

THE MIRROR

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The Importance of Being Present
The Future of the Shang Shung Foundation
Happy Birthday, Rinpoche
The Tibetan Cultural Centre in London, UK
The Vajra Dance of Space



INTERNATIONAL
DZOGCHEN
COMMUNITY

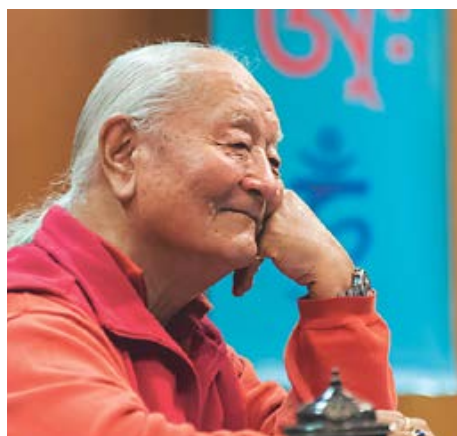


Photo: P. Fassoli

2018

Spain, Tenerife
Dzamling Gar
Dec. 28, 2017–Jan. 1, 2018
Ati Yoga Teaching and Practice
Retreat

February 16–March 2, 2018
Losar and Mandarava Drub-Chen

March 19–21, 2018
Santi Maha Sangha Base
Examination

March 23–30, 2018
Santi Maha Sangha 1st Level
Training

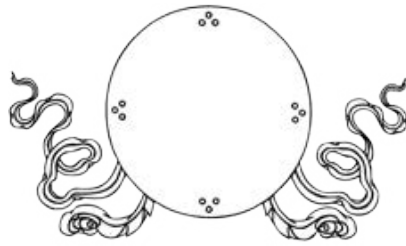
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Happy Birthday, Rinpoche

Written and presented by Steven Landsberg, the President of the International Dzogchen Community Gakyil, on the day of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's Birthday, December 8th, 2017.



On behalf of the International Dzogchen Community I would like to wish you, Rinpoche, a very happy birthday. Today is a special day and we are delighted to have the possibility to enjoy it together with you.

Many birthdays come and go but achieving 79 years of a life totally dedicated to the spiritual welfare of other beings is truly a landmark occasion. Your presence on this earth is so important to all of us as well as to infinite sentient beings, and knowing that, we pray that your life remains steadfast and firm within this human dimension. Every aspect of your body speech and mind intimately affects our lives and we are constantly aware of the importance of even the smallest details of what you say and do as well as to your program of activities. It is impossible for us to be otherwise.

First and foremost, we are grateful to you for having introduced us to our primordial condition. That is knowledge only you could have bestowed upon us. We could not have found that in any book. You

are the very root of our knowledge and whatever has arisen in our experience is just a result of that presence you have awoken in us. To be together with you, even for a few moments, is similar to a shower of blessings.... In this sense you are the Jewel of the Buddha.

For the last forty years you have continually given all your time to teaching us the profound instructions of the three vehicles of Sutra, Tantra, and Dzogchen and have communicated to us how we can apply those instructions and integrate them in our lives. We have learned from you how to collaborate joyfully and create events that can benefit sentient beings. *You* are the jewel of the Dharma.

Having created a world-wide Community consisting of Gars and Lings, in which we can all practice collectively and relate to one another on a warm and intimate level, you have taught us what it means to be part of a lively and meaningful Sangha that can navigate its way into a challenging future. You have established a very dy-

namic cultural center in the Shang Shung Foundation, which will make it possible for the wisdom of the Tibetan culture to reach every corner of the globe in the form of courses focused upon Tibetan medicine, yoga, dance, and meditation. Your intention to establish links between the west and current development in Tibet as well as other eastern countries has fruited into the ASIA foundation which is providing concrete educational possibilities, improved infrastructure, and health care facilities to countless beings. Your clarity has pointed out to us the direction in which we should move so that the Dzogchen Community can flourish for generations to come. You are the Jewel of the Sangha.

Today is your birthday and we are rejoicing being in your presence knowing you are the essence of the three jewels, the jewel of the sky, Namkhai Norbu, and that we have an international community that will remain stable for generations to come. ©

*80 years in Tibetan calculation

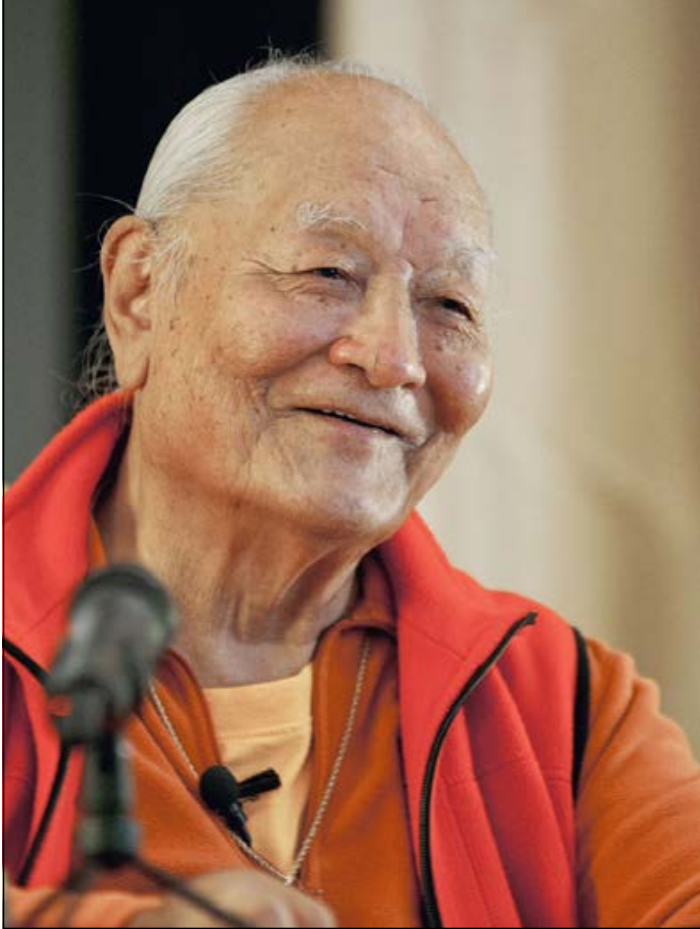
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The Importance of Being Present

An excerpt from the Longsal Rushen Retreat in Tenerife (Jan.27–Feb.3, 2017)
29 January 2017, afternoon session

After finishing *Ati* guruyoga what should you do? We do not have any kind of rule that says, “In the Dzogchen teaching you should do this or that”. Dzogchen teaching is beyond rules.

In the Dzogchen teaching the rule is that you are present. You are not distracted. This is what you should learn. This is the second most important thing in the Dzogchen teaching. If you like to do some visualization of deities, chanting mantras, invocations, etc., the Dzogchen teaching does not say that you shouldn't do that. You are always free. You should work with circumstances and when there are possibilities, you can apply [these things]. But after being in the state of *Ati* guruyoga, what is really necessary is that you should be present, not distracted. You should learn this.

Some of my students say, “You always tell us that being present is very important. I have tried to do this, but it is not so easy. I am always distracted”. Then that person no longer tries to be present. This is not good. Even though it is not easy, you should learn because it is not as difficult as, for example, making a sacrifice. I am not telling you to spend many years on a mountain and do like Milarepa did. That would be really difficult. I am not asking you to do anything like that. I'm only asking you to be present, not distracted. So, maybe if you don't know that then you should learn.

Our concept of not being distracted is a little different from not being distracted in the teaching. Our concept of not being distracted is this. If you think about something in your mind, for example, you want to write a letter, then you think that you don't want to be distracted by anything else. You always concentrate on what you should say in this letter and go ahead. If you are not present about that and do something else, then we say that you are distracted.

But in the teaching this is not being present. This is going after your mind and your concepts and being distracted by them. You are giving importance [to the concept] of writing letters in a perfect way. In the teaching being present is not like that. In the teaching what you should learn is just like how we drive a car. This is a good example because everybody has had this experience. At the beginning when you are learning to drive, it is not so easy. In the same way when you are learning to be present it is not so easy, but when you have trained one time, two times, three times, etc., it soon becomes easier and easier.

How should you do this kind of practice? You think, “Oh, today I want to learn how to be present, not distracted. I have an hour of free time that I want to dedicate to being present”. Now you have decided. You look at your watch. What time is it? Now you start in that moment. Then you think, “Which technique is it? What should I do now?” You don't do anything. You remain in your condition in general. In your mind there will be some ideas, “So, I am free, I am here being present”. Then you think, “Oh, now I want to go to the kitchen to prepare a coffee”. Now you are being present and you know that you are thinking to go to the kitchen. You are not distracted. You know that you are thinking that. But it doesn't mean you need to relax now. You are not doing contemplation, you are being present. Now that you are getting up and going to the kitchen, you know that you are getting up, that you are walking to the kitchen. You know what you are doing. Then you are making a coffee and bringing it back. You are always being present, not distracted.

In general, a lot of ideas come to our minds and we are conditioned by them, but you continue to be present about everything very precisely. You should be careful because you have a lot of mobile phones. When someone calls immediately you should be present. You notice that someone is calling. Now you pick up your phone and talk to that person, or your friend says something and you reply. You can be present – this is really what being present means. If you decided to do this practice for an hour, try to be present and not distracted. It is just like driving a car. When we become familiar with driving, we don't always need to concentrate only on the road and driving. When we are driving we can talk with our friends, we can look around, but we are not distracted from driving otherwise we would have an accident. This is the only thing we



learned when we drive a car. But our life is not only driving a car, there are infinite things. Learning how to be present means in all circumstances. Whatever is happening we are being present.

If you learn [how to do that] today and dedicate one hour, for example, when you repeat it tomorrow you will feel it to be a little easier. When you train another time it will become easier and easier, much easier than driving a car at the beginning. A good practitioner of Dzogchen is always present. Even when you are talking, you are working, you are doing any kind of activity, it is always possible to be present. When you are being present it is also very good and also helps very much in your relative condition. Particularly if you are being present you notice immediately when you have tensions. Then you are being present and you relax. When you relax you have no problem of the relative condition. So, being present is a very important practice in the Dzogchen teaching.

You can do that training with any kind of movements, not only when you are chanting and praying and reciting mantras, etc. For example, every evening we do Khaita dances. They are not a particular practice of Dzogchen, but it is training in presence. If you know how to be present, you dance and you train [your presence] and this is automatically Dzogchen practice. There is no difference between sitting some place for an hour and doing *thun* practice and dancing Khaita dances. Most people don't understand that. But the principle of integration in movement in the Dzogchen teaching is very important.

For example, you may think, "Now I am a Dzogchen practitioner, what I should do?" You should do *Ati guruyoga* and try to be in the state of contemplation as much as possible in any moment. This is really the path of realization. But when you are not in that state then you should try to be present, not distracted. If you apply that then you become a Dzogchen practitioner. Why? Because we know what the principle of the Dzogchen teaching is, that is, being forever in the state of the contemplation, in our real nature. In order to have this possibility we need to integrate all aspects of our body and speech and mind. Intellectually we can understand what we should do in the Dzogchen teaching, but in a practical way it is not so very easy with all the aspects of the physical level and those related with our body. But it is easier with all the aspects related to our voice and energy level, and even easier with our mental concepts. So, being present is related to our mental concepts. This is the first method in which we can apply integration in the state of the contemplation. When you become more and more familiar with that then there is also the possibility to gradually integrate the aspect of the voice. When we succeed in integrating all aspects of body and speech and mind totally, in the Dzogchen teaching this is called ting '*dzin khor yug chen mo*. It means life is total contemplation. Now even though you are living physically with a human body, your real condition is Samantabhadra, totally. That is what it says in the Dzogchen *Dra Thalgyur* tantra.

So, this is very important and you should try to remember it. This is my hope for all my students – at least they have learned *Ati guruyoga* and being present. That way when we finish the retreat and you go back home, I am very happy. And your life will also automatically change. Some people say, "I am following your teaching and you have changed my mind and my situation". This is not true.

The Future of the Shang Shung Foundation

An announcement made by webcast at Dzamling Gar, Tenerife, December 1, 2017. 10 am.
With the participation of Marco Baseggio, lawyer, and Giovanni Boni, engineer for the Dzamling Gar project.

Good day to everybody. As you can see, I have recovered well. During my illness I thought and reflected on various things. I thought about the present but also about the future of many situations or activities that we are going ahead with in our large Dzogchen Community. So I thought of calling this general meeting so that you can participate and listen to my thoughts and also express your ideas both for the present and especially for the future.

I think that having too many institutions that are officially recognised entails many expenses in terms of money and, most of all, in work. There are fewer and fewer people who can dedicate their time to the Community because when people have a job, this takes up most of their time. But we need to have some organizations in order to comply with the laws of all countries. As we know, all countries have laws. I also think that, wherever possible, it is good to reduce.

Now, for example, we have two foundations that work in the same field, culture. In this case, I think we could join the two foundations into one, a single foundation that is perhaps a little broader. We would join the two foundations officially, but internally they

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I have not changed anything for you. I have only made you understand how to integrate Dzogchen teaching. When you have understood that, with your being present you now feel relaxed. Before you had so many problems, you felt that life was very heavy but now you feel life is more harmonious and not really heavy. Then it seems you think that I have changed you, but you have changed by yourself. This is the effect of the Dzogchen teaching. This is what I want to ask everybody to try to remember, to not forget. If you have learned something about *rushen* that is also fantastic, it is good. And when you have time and possibility you should try to apply it. And that way, for example, you can understand what the difference is between mind and nature of the mind.

Transcribed by Agafonova Polina

Edited by Liz Granger



» continued from previous page

would maintain their own autonomy and characteristics and work with their own human and economic resources.

The present Shang Shung Foundation works mainly with culture, training new instructors and translators, research, and medicine, and will continue to work in this way because this is its specialisation. The other foundation would work in the field of culture and tourism using its own resources autonomously. In just a few words, this is the concept that I wanted to communicate. Then we will work on some projects and the details to be carried out. I hope I have explained it well.

Thank you. This is what I wanted to communicate.

Marco Baseggio: Rinpoche and Rosa have put me in charge. I have done some research in order to understand how to set up this new cultural foundation according to the law and how to fuse Shang Shung within this new cultural foundation. There are various ways to do this and in order to understand which path to follow, we have to decide firstly where the headquarters of the new foundation will be. But this is a relative aspect.

The principle is that according to the law the new foundation will have a wider purpose or goal, as we have understood and seen with Rinpoche and Rosa, so it will be able to contain within it a more specific department that is related to Tibetan culture in all its various aspects. While on the other hand, it will also be involved in aspects that are not so strictly related to Tibetan culture or to historical issues but more contemporary things. This new foundation will also include the Museum of Asian Art and Culture.

Legally we have checked and seen that we have all possibilities of doing this and now we just have to apply and decide some more specific and concrete aspects.

I am available to answer any legal questions that you may have. This is, more or less, what I wanted to say.

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu: Marco is a lawyer that I have known for many years and for me he is someone who is trustworthy. Whatever activities I have to do I like to have someone trustworthy who gives me advice and gets things done and this is why Marco has been carrying out this research as much as possible.

I've already said what I had to say. Then we have to work out all the details and how to carry things out.

Then there are also many offerings (for the Gönpa) that I have been given. I haven't had time to inform everybody because I was ill.

[The names of donors are read out.]

Thank you very much. This is what we have received. As you know it is very beneficial to participate not only for the Community, but also for yourselves because the Gönpa will remain as a place of practice for the future as well. That is why our engineer Giovanni has prepared something to show us how the work is going ahead right now with the Gönpa.

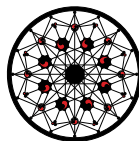
Giovanni Boni: Thank you Rinpoche. What we are doing is under the eyes of all of us here at Dzamling Gar but many people don't know about it and so we will show just a few photos and a short video so that people can understand. Once again I would like to thank all the donors who have been mentioned and also the previous ones, and especially once again, our Master.

The idea we have is to already have the new Gönpa functioning by the beginning of 2019. The project, however, will not be completed. Only the first phase will be completed in December 2018. In order to complete it, we will need at least another two or three years and still need your participation and donations. Even though so far, thanks to our Master's work and thanks to donors, we have raised more than four million euro, we still need to raise one to one and a half million euro. I wish everyone good work and participation.

We can show a short video to understand what point we are at. We've built the platform of the terrace. We've raised the first pillars and we've started fixing the girders that will be put together for the roofing. On December 12 we will start putting up the first girders and the roofing will be finished by March. But the whole work to make the Gönpa usable will not be finished until the end of November 2018.

This is all from me. If you have any questions, you may ask, and once again I thank our precious Master.

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu: I would like to thank not only those who offer money but all those people who are dedicating their work and their time. Giovanni Boni, the engineer, has told me that by next year the first phase will be completed in time for my birthday. I really hope that it will be like this because time is passing. We have very short lives. Nobody lives for centuries and centuries. So it is our hope that it will be completed. This is really important. For that reason I have really dedicated myself, as you know very well. We all have to live in our present time and do our best. Thank you. ❀



Update from the International Gakyil

In the recent period of the International Gakyil, there has been some big progress in the formal legal affiliation of several important centers of the International Dzogchen Community, officially bringing numerous communities of practitioners

into the unified Global Mandala of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. A lot of hard work was done both on the part of dedicated members from local Gars and Lings, as well as the International Gakyil, over the past years to make this happen. Tsegylgar East of the U.S. is now a legally affiliated entity of IDC in full. Munselling of Japan has also completed the process and is now legally affiliated, as well as Thayasling in Serbia. In addition to these formal legal affiliations,

in Russia a new legal entity for Kunsangar has now been established that is more convergent with the affiliated structure of IDC. Overcoming all the obstacles that come with bringing together so many diverse countries, each with their own unique legal systems, has been an inspiring process of collaboration based on a shared understanding of interdependence and a steady commitment to working with circumstance. The affiliation process for IDC has been one of the original main tasks of International Gakyil, so it is genuinely rewarding to see this work through to its near completion. ©



SHANG SHUNG FOUNDATION
INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR TIBETAN CULTURE

The Activities of Shang Shung Institute at Dzamling Gar

Amely Becker and Ilaria Faccioli

The activities of Shang Shung at Dzamling Gar for the year of 2017/2018 began this September. The idea is that each season is dedicated to one of the 5 pillars of Tibetan culture. During the autumn season we focused on Tibetan Language. This winter period we will dedicate to Tibetan Medicine. And in spring/summer of 2018 we will have Tibetan Art: Thanka Painting and Calligraphy.

From the end of October until 10th of November we enjoyed a 5 day course in *Drajyor* and 10 days of Tibetan Language training led by Fabian Sanders here at Dzamling Gar.

Over the years I have taken quite a few courses with Fabian on Tibetan Language and *Drajyor* in the UK. Each time a new understanding has arisen. My experience shows me that repeating these trainings from time to time really increases capacity and enjoyment of Tibetan Language and also the *Drajyor*. Fabian's knowledge of both and his gentle and pragmatic delivery of the material makes for an atmosphere of explorers and discoverers of a new world. When the letters spring to life through recognizing their meaning and "connect-

edness", we become quite excited and noisy with our expression of surprise and even joy. Learning in a group also has so many advantages as we all equally support and watch each other grow in the application of grammar and in discovering the 'connectors'.



Prof. Fabian Sanders teaching Tibetan language.

On the last night of Fabian's time here at the Gar he cooked a very delicious Chinese style soup, prepared for the purpose of fund raising for Shang Shung. Rinpoche provided many large and smaller items for an auction held in the cafeteria. Our cafeteria team supplied us with wine and cake to complete the meal. Whilst we were eating, our energy and focus was taken by this very rich noodle soup. Then, after a few glasses of wine, the auction really got buzzing.

We were able to raise 1,500 Euros for Shang Shung activities in particular the



ones for the winter season related to Tibetan Medicine.

Doctor Phuntsog Wangmo will be staying at Dzamling Gar for more than one month. She will arrive in the middle of January. Besides being available for private consultations she will present workshops on external therapies, hospice training, mental illness, diet and behavior from the point of view of Tibetan Medicine. Shang Shung Spain is at the moment working to establish a partnership with the University of La Laguna which always seems interested in the point of view of Tibetan Medicine.

Finally we would like to add that there will be regular *Ku-nye* treatments available from December of this year until March 2018 at the Gar, given by Aldo Oneto.

If you are interested in any of our activities you can contact Karina:

k.trofimova@shangshunginstitute.org ©



Update on Lekdanling, our Tibetan Cultural Centre in London, UK

Julia Lawless

Director of Shang Shung U.K.

It is now just over 2 years since we opened the doors to our Tibetan Cultural Centre in London, UK. This 'Ling' is quite unique as it is was consciously created to act as a combined urban hub for both Dzogchen Community activities and for open public events run by Shang Shung UK. This integrated 'open door' approach, which includes a wide range of cultural and transmission related activities, is the reason why Lekdanling has a rainbow-hued Tibetan infinite knot as its icon rather than the Longsal symbol.

Over the past twelve months there has been a marked increase in new people coming to attend open events at the Centre. Many of these people come from other Buddhist communities in London, some turn up via related cultural organisations (such as the Wellcome Collection) and others are simply interested locals who live around the Hackney area in East London and have somehow discovered us on the map! For example, our open yoga events with John Renshaw in 2017 were all well attended ... plus we are slowly attracting interest from followers of the thriving fitness-orientated yoga centre downstairs from our own studio space.

Our ongoing classical Tibetan language programme has been gathering momentum throughout 2017 with interest from several beginners wishing to deepen their understanding of practise through a knowledge of written Tibetan. I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Prof. Fabian Sanders for travelling to the UK to teach many long study weekends over the past few years and for always being so enthusiastic, diligent and dedicated in his work. He is also the Academic Director of Shang Shung U.K. and has been an invaluable guide in this respect. I would also like to thank Kathy Cullen for coordinating the Tibetan language activities this past year and for initiating a colloquial Tibetan course with Ngawang – a local Tibetan translator – and for offering to oversee the Tibetan language programme in 2018.

We have also been extremely fortunate to have enjoyed many fantastic Khaita weekends this past year with Elena Dumcheva. She is always bringing something new to the movements in terms of explanations and her deep understanding of the practise plus being extremely knowledgeable about a vast range of dances ... which is very inspiring! During the two most recent Khaita weekends we also were happy to welcome many members from the Tibetan Community in London, who found Rinpoche's commitment to revitalising interest in traditional Tibetan dance most moving. At our most recent Khaita weekend in late November, Tenzin (a Tibetan dance teacher based in London) came and led our group in learning a new traditional

Tibetan dance ... which was a really wonderful experience. Many thanks to Maciek and Gaoya for holding the Khaita banner aloft these past months and for moving in the direction of becoming Khaita instructors in their own right!

We held a 'Tibetan Medical' conference in the Spring of 2017 and were delighted and honoured to welcome Lelung Rinpoche to Lekdanling for the first time, where he spoke about the value of meditation in our daily life. Elio Guarisco also led a weekend on 'Presence and Awareness', with special attention to dealing with the emotions and Igor Berkhin led a weekend entitled 'Zen and Dzogchen'. Although both these weekends were open to the public, their precise explanations and practice instructions are equally valuable for anyone following the Santi Maha Sangha programme as they help to place the Dzogchen teachings in a larger Buddhist context. Cindy Faulkner skilfully led an open Vajra Dance weekend and also participated in our 'Music and Dance Festival' by teaching those dances which are available to the general public.

But perhaps the greatest increase in attendance this last year has been for our so-called SSIUK lecture series, which we hold at least once a month at Lekdanling on a Thursday evening. Charlie Morley, who has written several contemporary books on lucid dreaming and its benefits, drew a large crowd. I liked his lively, engaging approach to the subject and his update on ongoing research into modern scientific studies in this field was especially interesting. James Low is always popular as a speaker for his

Lekdanling: Place of Good Fortune

London Tibetan Cultural Centre

Ewa Michalec

Firstly, I just wanted to say what a privilege it is to have a place like Lekdanling available to us in London, where we can practice and nurture our particular lineage of the Buddha dharma and welcome many other aspects of Tibetan culture. I want to thank everyone involved in running Lekdanling: all those people who organize fantastic practice weekends and cultural events for everyone to enjoy. Special thanks go to the Gakyil and I would also like to share my appreciation for the Shang Shung UK team plus the many volunteers who help to run Lekdanling and organize all the events that take place there. Without all of these individuals giving up their time and energy, we would not be able to do all that we do... We hope that they know how grateful the rest of the community feels towards them. Please anyone reading this article, let them know how much they are all appreciated, include them in your practice and generally extend our thanks to them.

We have had many memorable events this last year and there are also many wonderful courses coming up soon ... and from my perspective at least, some of the most interesting and enjoyable ones are the Khaita weekends. On recent occasions, such as at the Music and Arts Festi-

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direct and innovative ideas on traditional Buddhist themes, such as 'emptiness' and coming up in January 2018: 'Who am I?' Likewise, we had a 'full house' for John Reynolds talk on 'Tibetan Shamanism' with special reference to early Bon rites and how these were related to other forms of Shamanism ... and indeed to present day Buddhist ritual practises. His wide ranging knowledge of the subject and his personal experiences of meeting shamans during his travels in the East were illuminating. We have also started live streaming our lectures via Facebook (to a increasing following) and some highlight lectures are also being produced as Vimeo downloads



val (7-8th October), and the recent Khaita course in November, these weekends have also included a most welcome participation from members of the Tibetan Community in London. In December, Tenzin Lodup, key choreographer for cultural dances of the local Tibetan community in Britain, also came and taught several dances to our local Khaita group. This was a real treat! Others also joined in with our circle dances as well as performing traditional Tibetan music.

Many practitioners of Khaita mention what a joyful and freeing practice it is ... it is really the practice of presence in action! Such practices are open to everyone without limitation. Please consider forwarding all these type of open events, which are organized by Shang Shung UK, to people you know who may be interested but might not already be aware of them. Maybe they can really benefit from participating in these activities.

as an option after the event, which can be found listed on our website.

I am extremely grateful to everyone on our amazing SSIUK team who collectively coordinate activities (via promotions, fundraising, shop sales, management, filming etc) and without whom none of these events would be possible. Many thanks to Anne Bancroft (our new Arts Director), Rich, Jamyang, Mike, Kathy, Jon, Katrina, Maciek and Gaoya as well as all the volunteers who give up their time and weekends willingly to help keep the 'show on the road' and further the appreciation of Tibetan culture.

And please come to our Ganapujas! It is a good time to reconnect with all of the community. It is so nice to come away from the busy-ness of our daily lives and the city, and to meet as Vajra brothers and sisters, joining together in practice. Afterwards we have a chance to speak and enjoy one another's company and to support each other at whatever point we are in our lives. Also, after Ganapuja we very often dance Khaita. So as I said before, it is so nice to have a place like this to come together.

If you'd like to come to any of these events, please don't let a lack of finances keep you away. You can always do work exchange or just give what you can. No one will be turned away due to lack of funds.

Finally, I'd like to say a few words about the Hackney area, and its great food and coffee and general Bohemian style! Victoria Park Village is just down the road near the fantastic Victoria Park, one of the hidden gems of the city. And there are excellent cafes and artist's studios all along the main road there.

Closer to Lekdanling, there are a few specific places I'd like to mention if you are looking for a bite to eat or something to drink. First, some of the best coffee in London can be had at the Roastery and Cafe, 'The Grand Howl', just around the corner from Lekdanling on Well Street. It is only open during the day until about 5pm, but is definitely worth a visit, not just for the coffee, but there are amazing dishes on offer. Two other great restaurants in the area are: Well Street Kitchen, only open during the day until 5pm, offering fantastic brunch and very healthy dishes; second Well Street Pizza, which have the tastes of Napoli right on Lekdanling's doorstep.

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Tibetan Language Studies in London

Kathy Cullen

This autumn at Lekdanling in London, we started a beginners' Classical Tibetan language course with Dr. Fabian Sanders, and the response was very good. About thirteen people participated in the first weekend, ten in person and three via skype. The majority of the students were not part of the International Dzogchen Community, but had various interests and reasons for wanting to learn the language. Several people also said how appreciative they were that the program was available and at such an affordable price.

Near the end of the weekend, some of the students asked about the possibility of further practice in pronunciation, which was the main topic of the first weekend,



learning the alphabet and pronunciation, as well as the history of the language and so forth. So, we approached a native Tibetan speaker named Ngawang Tenzin who was born in Tibet and trained in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy and language near Lhasa, Tibet, and then in India, and who currently works as a freelance translator and Tibetan language teacher here in London, and he kindly offered to come provide us with some sessions on pronunciation practice before the course with Dr. Sanders continues in January.

There seems to be interest for the language in London with many students and teachers to draw upon, so we hope to continue to develop language studies and study groups here in close coordination with the other ongoing programs at other Gars and Lings.

If you'd like to be put on our mailing list or if you know how to read and pronounce the Tibetan alphabet and you'd like to join the next weekends of the beginners' course in person or via Skype, please visit <http://www.shangshunguk.org/> for more information. ©

SSIUK

2018 Programme of Events

12–14 January

Tibetan Language – Beginners Part II
with Prof Fabian Sanders

19–21 January

Who Am I: Buddhist Approaches to the
Mystery of Me Being Me
Friday lecture & weekend seminar with
James Low

27–28 January

Khaita Joyful Dancing & New Year Party!
with Elena Dumcheva

» continued from previous page

Another mention is the taproom Mother's Kelly's, run by a great proprietor who has always been supportive of our work and finally, if you are looking for an inexpensive, quick bite to eat, there is Kuzu Meze right down at the end of the road near the main street. At Victoria Park Village there are a whole range of restaurants and pubs – such as the 'The Empress', which serves great pub food.

With all of this on offer, plus all the fantastic events, I just wanted to say welcome to our home! ©

1st February

SSIUK Lecture
with Darig Thokmay

9–11 February

Tibetan Language – Beginners Part III
with Prof Fabian Sanders

17–18th February

Losar: Prayer Flag Making Workshop for
Children & Adults

8 March

SSIUK Lecture
with Professor Fabian Sanders

9–11 March

Tibetan Language – Beginners Part IV
with Prof Fabian Sanders

24–25 March

Yantra Yoga for Beginners
with John Renshaw

19th April

SSIUK Lecture: Book Launch Event
with Naomi Levine

16–23rd April at Kunselling

Kunye Part II
with Aldo Oneto

28–29th April

Khaita Joyful Dancing
with Elena Dumcheva

11–13th May

Festival of Mind

3rd–21st August

East Tibet Trip
with Jamyang Oliphant

8–9 September

Khaita Joyful Dancing
with Elena Dumcheva

29–30 September

Yantra Yoga for Beginners
with John Renshaw

12–14 October

Open Vajra Dance Event
with Cindy Faulkner

9–11th November

Tibetan / Advanced Beginners Part I
with Prof Fabian Sanders

24–25th November

Khaita Joyful Dancing
with Elena Dumcheva

7–9th December

Tibetan / Advanced Beginners Part II
with Prof Fabian Sanders

Festival of Mind

May 2018, London
Mindfulness: Past, Present & Future

The Shang Shung UK Team

"We should let the mind become relaxed maintaining only a clear presence of its natural condition, without getting distracted, forgetting, or letting ourselves get wrapped up in our thoughts. When the mind is naturally relaxed and present, it comes to itself in its authentic State."

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu

We would like to invite you to London in Spring 2018, from 11th to 13th May, for our first 'Festival of Mind' initiative. We hope this will become an annual event to explore different aspects of the mind from a range of perspectives and disciplines. During this initial weekend we will be looking at the theme of 'Mindfulness': where it has come from, the ways in which it has evolved in the West and discuss the possible potentiality it represents ... as well as the possible pitfalls involved.

Mindfulness' has been a buzz-word for some years in the West. But what has happened to the original meaning of mindfulness? Have the authentic Buddhist ideals of self-reflection, compassion and ultimate realization been sacrificed on the altar of materialist desires? As Buddhism comes west, has the 'cult of mindfulness' been transformed into a disingenuous tool for attaining personal or corporate gain? Or does mindfulness still hold a valuable key in helping us all to understand our own true nature and show the way towards fulfilling our real potential? Is the term 'mindfulness' really incorporating all aspects of what Rinpoche calls 'presence and awareness' as a key principle to integrate into our daily lives? Perhaps the Western mindfulness movement is just scratching the surface of something much richer and much deeper ...

We will explore the precise Buddhist origins of mindfulness and discuss whether the popularity of so-called 'secular mindfulness' has simply become a gimmick in a

materialistic society where the real aims of the practice have been glossed over. In the words of Mario Poceski, from the University of Florida:

"The secularized form of mindfulness that elicits increasing popularity is usually promoted as a psychosomatic technique that can enhance one's mental and psychological well-being. This trend is exemplified by the writings of Jon Kabat-Zinn and other authors, who aim to strip this and other Buddhist forms of meditation of their religious roots. Trying to reach a broad American audience, including those who feel uncomfortable about engaging with a "foreign" tradition such as Buddhism or have general anti-religious bias, they present mindfulness as a potent, convenient, and effective form of therapy or self-help. What we end up with is the peddling of a retooled and secularized form of meditation, divested of ethical concerns, lacking in capacity to critically counter prevalent values, and unable to challenge the sociopolitical status quo. Glossing over overtly religious goals such as spiritual awakening and self-transcendence, the purveyors of this type of technique of "personal growth" purport to offer help with physical healing, overcoming of stress or other psychological problems, and success in all sort of mundane endeavors, including enhanced work productivity."

Then we will ask: 'Where now?' Through plenty of round-table discussions and audience participation we hope to open up a possible way ahead ...

"If mindfulness can make a real contribution to the betterment of humanity, then the central role of the religious tradition that created the original practice should be openly acknowledged, even celebrated, not buried out of sight. While I cannot foresee Buddhist organizations trademarking the term and the practice, along the lines of what corporations do with their intellectual property, perhaps there should be clearer calls for disclosure and honesty about the origins of the practice, and open acknowledgement of the central role of Buddhism. That can also pave the way for a more candid and nuanced reassessment of the whole mindfulness movement. Bringing a more traditional Buddhist perspective can perhaps even lead to a clearer understanding of some of the downsides—including the missed opportunities and things lost - in this specific instance of spiritual commodification and cultural (mis)appropriation ..." (ibid)

Speakers at the Festival on Saturday come from a range of backgrounds, having

had diverse training and experience in traditional or contemporary mindfulness and its application to fields such as psychology, cognition and lucid dreaming. International experts include Ian Baker, Elio Guarisco, Igor Berkhin, Charlie Morley and Laura Donnington. We will conclude the day with a reception and party in the evening with Khaita! ©



Music and Dance Festival

At Lekdanling 7–8th October 2017

Elena Dumcheva

On Saturday 7th October, we had a very nice Khaita and Tibetan cultural event in Lekdanling, London during a weekend long Himalayan Music & Dance Festival, organised by Shang Shung UK.

We had a Khaita workshop followed by local Tibetan artists with traditional dancing and singing, and a Nepalese music band, then we all danced Khaita together.

There were quite few local Tibetans participating – all enjoyed dancing and singing together and were very impressed by the way Rinpoche has inspired us through Khaita. We presented the Tibetan artist guests with a copy of "Message from Tibet" and "Commentaries on Message from Tibet". They were very happy with these gifts. We hope to do more similar events with the Tibetan community of the UK in the future.

To Chögyal Namkhai Norbu
"Please accept our warmest wishes from London,
We are doing our best and pray for Your long and stable life". ©



SHANG SHUNG INSTITUTE

МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ ИНСТИТУТ ТИБЕТСКОЙ КУЛЬТУРЫ

Medical Anthropology Webinar

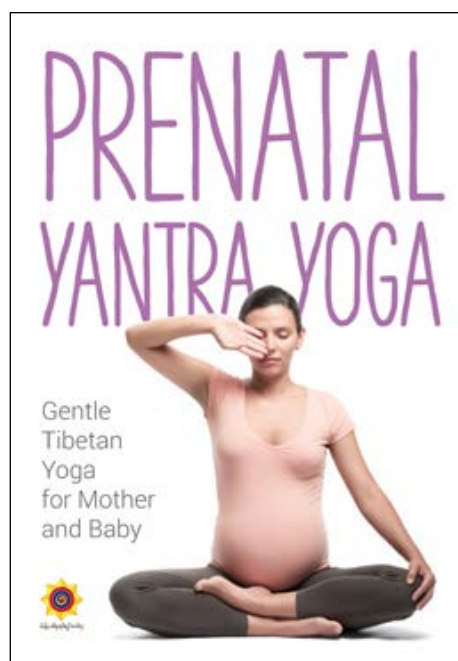
On 23 November 2017 at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology (IEA) of the Russian Academy of Sciences located in Moscow, Russia, in collaboration with Shang Shung Institute of Russia, there was a webinar on medical anthropology named "Benefits of breathing practices in Yantra Yoga, Tibetan yoga of movement". The seminar was conducted by Oleg Tanakov, certified Yantra Yoga instructor.

We are grateful to the IEA for a true interest and collaboration in studying of different aspects of the Tibetan culture! ©



SHANG SHUNG PUBLICATIONS

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Prenatal Yantra Yoga is a new DVD published by Shang Shung Publications and produced by Palzom Films. It is a special version of Yantra Yoga adapted to the needs and condition of women during pregnancy: it is gentle, easy to apply, and highly beneficial for both mother and child. This beautiful and relaxing video is intended for expectant mothers who are already familiar with the basics of Yantra Yoga.

Prenatal Yantra Yoga is available as a DVD: <http://shop.shangshungfoundation.com/en/dvd/738-prenatal-yantra-yoga-9788878341586.html> and as a downloadable video: <http://shop.shangshungfoundation.com/en/downloadable-video/739-video-download-prenatal-yantra-yoga-2000000002163.html> ©

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Transform Rewa's Dream Into Reality

Think how nice it would be if this Christmas you could invite a Tibetan child to lunch. Think how nice it would be if you could give him the warmth of your home and your affection. And how good would it be to give him a gift that lasts forever, with the hope that it will turn into certainty in his future? The child you see in the photo is called Rewa, he is 5 years old and comes from the school of Wakha, which is located at 3500 meters above sea level. In winter, the temperatures sometimes drop to -20 degrees centigrade and Rewa has to live there all year round.

The school of Wakha is located in a remote and poor area, inhabited by nomads,

in the county of Namchen, in the Yushu Prefecture in Qinghai (Tibet). Here the study of the Tibetan language and culture is increasingly at risk.

The school that Rewa attends is crucial to ensuring his right to education and that of the children belonging to the local Tibetan community. Since 2013 we have been involved in the Wakha school by building a new structure with classrooms, staff offices and dormitories for over 100 students living there.

To prevent the children of this school from eating outside in the cold or mud, on rocks and tree trunks, in April 2017 we started construction of a kitchen, a refectory, toilets, showers, a sports ground and surrounding walls. The costs we have to cover are still very expensive and we need everyone's participation. With your contribution, we can provide a place where the



children of Wakha can eat in a warm and safe environment, no longer in the cold and in the rain.

With your donation, it will be as if you are inviting Rewa and the other children to your Christmas dinner...because they do not like eating outside.

Transform Rewa's name, which means hope in Tibetan, into reality. If it is true that destiny comes with every name, then show Rewa the Hope of a better world for him and the School of Wakha.

You can make the donation through paypal on <https://asia-ngo.org/wakhaen> or by bank transfer in the name of ASIA Onlus

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1988/2018: Thirty Years of Activities, of Eager Commitment

The 2018 calendar is dedicated to thirty years of ASIA. It was on December 21, 1988, when a group of 9 students, passionate about Tibet, joined their master Chögyal Namkhai Norbu at a notary's office in Rome to found ASIA. Over time the goals we have achieved have been many, and ASIA's mission too has grown wider: today we are operating in 6 countries Tibet, Nepal, India, Mongolia, Myanmar and Sri Lanka.

To recount the 30 years of ASIA we have chosen **photographs by Enrico Dell'Angelo**: this calendar is intended as an homage in his memory. Enrico was one of the founding members of ASIA a passionate Tibetologist, and an expert in international co-operation, who dedicated his whole life to Tibet.

The verses that accompany the images in our calendar are drawn from great research of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu on the songs and dances of contemporary Tibetan



artists "Message from Tibet through songs and dances," (Shang Shung Edizioni, Arcidosso 2014).

ASIA continues to work in the field. If you, too want to contribute, choose the ASIA calendar.

You can order the ASIA Calendar on the following link <http://www.asia-ngo.org/new/gift-solidarity/calendar-2018/>

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Folk Dance of Tenerife.

Photo by Lesya Cherenkova

The Birthday of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu

Dancing and Singing
with the Stars
December 8th, 2017

The day began with the greeting of the Snow Lion as Rinpoche was escorted to the Gönpa for a day of celebration. The traditional honorific *dung chen* or Tibetan horns were blowing, khataks waving and smiles and cheers abounding as Rinpoche walked through the Gönpa to his chair.

Settling in as always, after Rinpoche asked people to "sit down please", Nina Robinson led us in the Mandarava practice. After the practice there was a formal mandala offering led by an official guest. Steve Landsberg gave a moving birthday speech [see page 1] expressing the deep gratitude and wishes for good health and long life of all those present, and the many not present, to Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, acclaiming his myriad accomplishments and our collective desire for many more years together.

After the speech and another mandala offering, we were able to go to Rinpoche and offer gifts. Abundance was not lacking.

And then, joyous dance after joyous dance, applied with skill, grace and excellent choreography by a dedicated and talented group of our Vajra family members, filled the birthday of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu on December 8, 2017 with radiance and delight. Just when you thought the previous dance could not be surpassed, the next group of dancers came on the scene and raised the ante. Charming representations from many lands, opening with the children, to Tarantella from South Italy, moving on to Ukraine, Russia, Japan, India, Hawaiian Hulu, Argentinean folk dance, to the exciting and dramatic local Tenerifian folk dance. Interspersed were Khaita dances, songs from Sonam and Loten, magical and mystical displays of juggling and light shows from Medved from the Czech Republic, and the top of the line was the special guest appearance of one of our beloved Khaita singers, Lobsang Delek, who actually sang and trained some of our dancers with his songs. [see page 15] The happiness and appreciation was visible on all the faces, not least of all Rinpoche's.

There was a sit down lunch feast, birthday videos of greetings from around the world, the Dzogchen Communities and ASIA as, as well as a very fine video portraying the amazing transformation of the Dzamling Gar from its dusty beginnings until now, where on December 14th, the first ceiling beam was raised on the new structure.

After the lunchtime rest there were some Tibetan games of strength and skill, more music and dances with Lobsang Delek, and an evening soup, after which the day finally drew to close.

Rinpoche said some words expressing gratitude [see page 15] and looking quite pleased and touched by the display of love and care that was demonstrated on this auspicious day. He was escorted to his new coach that awaited him at the Gönpa entrance, and off he rode into the Dzamling Gar evening.

A special thanks to Tshering Choden and Thubten Rabgyi the Gekö for the excellent project management of this now historic event. ©



Steven Landsberg
giving birthday address.
Photo by Naomi Zeitz

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu

It has been a joyous day. First of all, I recovered lapplausel. Now I am truly recovered, so this is a very good thing in order to go ahead. In fact, you know very well that when we say 'celebrate a birthday' this means getting older and not getting younger. But I feel almost rejuvenated, my health is better than the last year, for example, so this is a very good thing.

Also you have come from all over and I want to thank you and I am really glad for your participation. This is very important not only for my birthday, but in general for the Dzogchen Community. For the future, the participation and the collaboration of all people are fundamental.

You know very well how many crises and problems we have in the world, but we are Dzogchen practitioners, we know their cause and we know how *to work* with the cause. So we try to do our best not only for ourselves, but for all. The teaching – not only the Dzogchen teaching, but all the teachings, starting from the Hinayana – is for all sentient beings, not only for a group of practitioners. Therefore it must function. The Dzogchen teaching is really one of the best because it allows us to integrate and to live according to the circumstance. We have learned this, we are applying this and we are bringing the teaching forward collaborating all together. Therefore I am very glad, thank you all.

Tomorrow many of you will leave. I want to wish you a safe journey back and we will see each other soon.

I also want to inform you that there were 1415 webcast contacts in the world.

Ok, thank you all.



Biography of Lobsang Delek

Lobsang Delek is a young multi-talented, charismatic Tibetan singer with a music style of his own. He was born in Tehor Karze, one of the great regions of the Dokham Chushi Gangdruk (Four Rivers and Six Ranges) of Tibet. His biggest inspiration for music was his parents.

Lobsang went to India in 1997 and he completed his undergraduate in TCV Gopalpur School. His first album, *Cuckoo*, was released and distributed in 2007 while he was studying in the College for Higher Tibetan Studies at Sarah in India. Since then, he received positive acclaim from Tibetans both in and outside Tibet. The popular songs are: *Beloved Tenzin Dolma*, and one about the motherland called *Chung Ya Ri Lo*. Later Lobsang released a second album called *Tenzin Dolma Returns* during his final year in the Sarah College, the number one hit was *Tendel Sangpo* or *Do La Tra Mo*.

Lobsang has won huge love and respect from the Tibetan people and has become a most admired young singer. His songs became hits and celebrated in all the regions of Tibet and even many prominent artists such as Sherten and Tsewang Lhamo use his songs. His songs were also shown in XZTV and Sichung Khampa TV and he was interviewed in many prominent media like VOA, RFA, Tibet Express, and Soyala. His latest release, *bhoed La Dro*, meaning *Let's go to Bodhgaya*, India in 2012. The album was named to represent the spirit and inner voice of Tibetan brothers and sisters who live outside of Tibet.

bhoed La Dro was a hit in Tibet, India, Bhutan and Nepal and loved by the Himalayan people. Particularly *Zalhu* one of his love song music videos became an immediate smash hit and a song on everyone's lips.

Thus, he was officially invited for some Himalayan Festivals organized by the government of India and has performed as a representative artist of Tibet with other Bollywood artists.

Lobsang has given concerts in many different states and several countries both East and West, and many of his songs are also liked by many foreigners in the West, especially the devotional and folk songs like *Puuyana*, *Kongshey* and *bhoed La Dro*. These are sung and danced in many Buddhist Institutes in Europe and Russia. Dzamling Gar, the main seat of the international Dzogchen Community, uses these songs and dances for Khaita (Harmony in Space). Lobsang's songs are generally based on spirituality, love, patriotism, traditional pop, and social orientation. Currently Lobsang lives in Paris and is performing!



Lobsang Deleg

I am sorry, but my English is not very good. I spent some years in European countries where the English language is not used so much, so I forgot a little.

I think today a dream came true. For a long time I really wanted to meet Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche, because I am a person who wants to study Tibetan history and Tibetan culture. I studied it in a college for high Tibetan studies in Sarah, near Dharamsala, so I heard about Rinpoche so many times!

Rinpoche has such a good connection to my songs and they are danced here in the International Dzogchen Community. Khaita songs are very popular, they have become widely known on Facebook and many Tibetan fans of mine called me and said, "Oh, Westerners are dancing your songs!" My fans are shocked on one side, and on another side they feel encouraged. So I am very happy to meet all you guys and especially Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche and I am very, very happy today to have joined with you all to celebrate Rinpoche's birthday.

I would like to say thank you so much to the people who put an effort to invite me here, the Dzogchen Community and the Shang Shung Foundation. I want to say "Buena noche a todos, bonsoir a tout le monde!"

So today I am going to sing a couple of my songs that you are dancing. It would be a very nice offering to Rinpoche with some other smart dances of your Community. I will also sing a song that I heard Rinpoche likes called Penchent by the singer Yardung. It is not one of my songs, but it is a popular Tibetan song, so I will try my best. Then we can all join to dance Phuyana.

Thank you, you guys dance really well, I really appreciate this from the bottom of my heart. I truly want to stay here with you to dance and relax, because in Paris everyone is very busy, it is a little crazy. Here I feel relaxed and I wish I could stay a bit longer, but on December 16th I have a concert, so I cannot spend much time here with you. But I am very happy to have been here and especially to have met Rinpoche. Thank you so much. ©

Transcription and translation by Rita Bizzotto

A Brief Story of the Painting of Changchub Dorje by Drugu Choegyal Rinpoche

Given to Rinpoche at the event of his Birthday on December 8th, 2017 at Dzamling Gar

Mark Farrington

About two years ago I contacted Drugu Choegyal Rinpoche via Alessandra Bonomo and inquired about commissioning a painting for Rinpoche's birthday. I asked him to conceive of a painting that would celebrate Rinpoche's 40 years of Teaching Dzogchen and honor his tremendous sacrifice in this life for his students and humanity in general. Choegyal Rinpoche soon replied that he had the perfect idea. Unfortunately, Drugu Choegyal's own Teacher became ill and he was busy taking care of him for most of last year. When he returned to work on the painting earlier this year, he sent an initial view of the painting and revealed to us that it would be a portrait of Changchub Dorje. The painting was already beautiful with his powerful gaze and divine shades of light around the figure, however, what was truly special was the news that Choegyal Rinpoche had interviewed an old Togden who was also a student of Changchub Dorje, and this old Yogi told the biography and miraculous stories of Changchub Dorje's life, presumably, more stories that transpired even after our Rinpoche left Tibet. In any case, this story is written as a back drop to the painting and no one has read it. We won't learn the story until Rinpoche reads it and tells us what it says.

The whole project of commissioning the painting, organizing various payments, collecting and transporting it to London where it was framed could not have been done without the brilliant and considerate assistance of others. Thank you Alessandra for arranging this marvelous possibility, and thank you to Wilvin Pederson for collecting and transporting the painting. We all hope that Rinpoche will enjoy this special offering. Choegyal Rinpoche wrote a special dedication on the back of the painting to both Rinpoche and all his students. ©



Photo by W Pederson

Right page: All photos by Lesya Cherenkova



ChNN



2017



Lama Tsultrim Allione

The Woman Who Makes the World Believe in Magic

Anca Russu



Strangely enough, I've known Lama Tsultrim Allione (or her Five Steps of the Feeding Your Demons process) long before I came into contact with the Dzogchen teaching and the fact that I've not only succeeded in finally meeting her, but had the opportunity to practice with her, are some of the most beautiful gifts I've received from this interconnected Universe of ours.

Ever since I was a baby and until about seven years ago, when I started using the Five Steps method, I found it very hard to relate to people no matter the age, appearance or the love they felt for me. I was always residing within a strange feeling of not belonging, of being out of time, space, tune and race, so I didn't communicate much throughout my childhood and teenage period because either I didn't see any reason to do so or didn't find the right words or, more often, I felt too shy to even open my mouth. And as the silence wasn't enough, an eating disorder came to complete the "package" I wrongly battled with all my life.

I've test-driven a lot of therapies and all the new self-help methods, hoping to find a way to feel less of an alien to my fellow man, but nothing seemed to really work until I encountered, quite by chance, the most peculiar of self-treatments, the Five Steps of the Feeding Your Demons. I was stunned when I read it for the first time as I didn't understand why should I take the temperature and feel the texture of my inner demons, not to mention how my brows raised in wonder when I understood that I should ask them how they are as I had before me friends and not my oldest and worst enemies.

I would like to say that I had a special feeling on encountering this method, but the truth is at that point I would have tried anything that gave me a shadow of a hope of feeling better and I thought that such a strange approach deserved a chance.

On the other hand, not knowing the source of the practice permitted me to

make the process of feeding the demons mine, shape shifting it like an amoeba to meet my needs. And I believe that if I had known then about the importance of Lama Tsultrim and about Machig Labdron I wouldn't have felt so free in using the method as I wanted.

Needless to say, it not only worked, but Lama Tsultrim's method helped me to make painful baby steps in getting in touch with myself, a work in progress that is now stronger than ever and that never gets comfortable. It is never easy to face your darkest self, but in the process of accepting Miss Hyde and embracing her I found the amazing strength that resides in being sincere with myself.

When I realized that this method changed me to the core and especially the way I view, feel and interact with the environment, I recognized the vital importance of the gift Lama Tsultrim made to the modern world by coming up with a method of self-healing that can be adopted by anyone, no matter their belief or culture.

For a modern person who is not into Buddhism, reciting Tibetan words (no matter the potentiality they have) won't really make a difference, but to take the temperature of the inner demon, caress to see the texture its surface has and finally ask: "What do you really need?" and "How would you feel if you got what you need?" can ring a whole bunch of bells. Slowly you understand that the shadows you got out and fed don't torture you anymore, they don't control you.

Maybe it will sound like I am exaggerating, but I strongly feel that only a real Mother of the World could come up with such a method and yes, of course, I didn't forget that it is inspired by the words and practice of Machig Labdron herself, but my point is that only a mother can nurture her child with what the child really needs and the modern world needs a "custom made" Chöd practice. In the end, isn't the most important question of Lama Tsultrim's Five

Steps of the Feeding Your Demons process: "What do you really need?"?

I understood how important it has been to have my Vajra family by my side when I plunged in to take out my most feared demon which was the silent and scared little girl whose fragility and sensitivity I really didn't want in my life, but I knew that the woman I am will never be "finished" without accepting that little girl as an important part of herself. And I felt that my dear Vajra family with whom I was practicing had my back covered and that feeling gave me the courage to do what I didn't have the nerve to even think of too much up to that point.

I thought a lot on what I've learned and experienced during that brief retreat and I started listening to some interviews and lectures of Lama Tsultrim on Chöd and on the Divine Feminine and so I comprehended that what I was missing, the whole world is missing – the acceptance of fragility, of love that caresses, of the affectionate eyes that see beauty in monsters and frightful demons, of the heart that gives light, of the mouth that opens to express profound emotions, of the hands that are not raised to point to guilty ones but to give what is really, really needed – the amrita of unconditional love and acceptance.

This is what I feel it is the work of Lama Tsultrim. She is getting the world to believe in magic again, in the wonder of being all interconnected in a beautiful golden web of warm light sewn by dakinis who dance on rainbows.

Thank you Mother for awaking the loving woman inside of me and I wholeheartedly hope your love and compassion will make the world believe in magic again. ©

Autumn at Merigar West

During the summer of 2017 we had a continuous stream of visitors, passing tourists, organized tour buses, trekking groups and bike tourists at Merigar West. The Lonely Planet guide experts visited the Gar and will include it in the next edition.

Since December 2016 with the inauguration of the Museum of Asian Art and Culture (MACO) in our local village, Arcidosso, the Merigar West Dzogchen Community has shown its intention to make known the importance of Tibetan culture for its priceless values of peace, the importance of individual development through knowledge, respect for all and promotion of integration between cultures.

After the large Sangha retreat last summer, attended by more than 650 people, (the audio of the sessions can be followed on dzogchen.net – webcast), there was good participation in events such as Yoga Holidays for adults and children (July 17–23), with the participation of several instructors and animators, the Mindfulness course with Elio Guarisco (September 30–October 1), and the Open Mindfulness course (November 10–12) with Shangpa Master Denys.

On December 4 the Khenpo of Galenteng Monastery in East Tibet, the residence of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's uncle, Khyentse Chökyi Wangchuk, paid a short visit to Merigar West on his way to greet Rinpoche in Tenerife. He made a complete tour of the Gar and later greeted practitioners and spoke a little about the history of the monastery and his life spent mainly in retreat.

There was considerable public participation in the autumn cycle of conferences organized by the Gar in cooperation with MACO and with the sponsorship of the Municipality of Arcidosso. The courses included ongoing courses on Tibetan language and calligraphy with Fabian Sanders, Giorgio Dallorto, and Lobsang Zatul, a course on Mindfulness with Elio Guarisco, a Conference on Tibetan Medicine given by Dr Yulia Yusipova, a talk on the Human Condition in Tibetan Medicine by Dr. Gino Vitiello, and a talk on Birth and Death according to Tibetan Buddhism given by Dr. Gino Vitiello.

Merigar West is now carrying out numerous winter activities and is preparing to welcome 2018. In particular we are or-



Conference on presence related to diet according to Oriental medical systems in the Arcidosso Municipality Conference Hall with Elio Guarisco, September 30, 2017.

ganizing weekend courses on the Base of the Santi Maha Sangha, in view of the next exam to be held in March at Dzamling Gar in Tenerife.

We received a visit from an expert of the MIBAC Ministry (Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism) who analyzed the current situation of the Gönpa, which celebrates 28 years since the foundation ceremony. She admired the paintings that have an important artistic and cultural value and must be preserved and maintained in excellent condition to avoid deterioration, and evaluated the structure of Gönpa. She gave advice for its maintenance, which will become restoration projects of the paintings and maintenance of the structure.

In December the earth moving works begin for the new road that will pass below the Yellow House. This new road will allow us to move the parking lot and create a garden and a pedestrian area around the Yellow House, a new outdoor space to embrace all of us and to welcome visitors.

At Merigar West every weekend throughout the year there are meditation classes, Yantra Yoga courses, etc. for those who are coming to the Gar for the first time, as well as retreats of explanation and practice for old and new practitioners of the Dzogchen Community.

We are approaching the end of the year and we would like to remind members of the Community of the importance of everyone's participation in the growth and development of Merigar and its Lings in order to support them and allow everyone to enjoy the benefits of the Dzogchen teaching.

Membership allows you to be part of the Dzogchen Community, and to share its mission in supporting the valuable teachings of Master Chögyal Namkhai Norbu.

Membership conditions are the same as last year.

Membership can be done at your Ling or at Merigar directly.

www.dzogchen.it



Mindfulness training with Elio Guarisco, Sept. 30–Oct. 1, 2017.



SMS 7th Lojong with Oliver Leick October 13–15, 2017.



Yantra Yoga supervision 4th & 5th series with Laura Evangelisti, October 27–29, 2017.



SMS 6 Mind Trainings with Igor Legati November 17–19, 2017.



SMS the 4 Immeasurables with Luigi Vitiello Dec. 7–10, 2017.

Shangpa Master Denys Brings Open Mindfulness to Merigar West

Susan Schwarz

From November 10 to 12, 2017, Merigar West had the pleasure to host Shangpa Master Denys for an Open Mindfulness Training seminar. Given that being present is the most important practice in the Dzogchen teaching after Guruyoga, it goes without saying that any technique at all that can facilitate developing presence is a precious opportunity for us.

Open Mindfulness Training or OMT is an effective method developed by Lama Denys that systematically guides participants in the process of developing open, altruistic mindfulness. It is what he calls a humanist philosophy, secular and nondenominational, focused on the transformation of ourselves, of our fundamental ethical and spiritual values. The OMT method is usually transmitted over a period of two months in eight weekend training sessions, each followed by a week of practice. But as condensed as the presentation at Merigar was, it conveyed a very real experience of mindfulness, and at the same time gave us some basic tools that we can continue to apply on our own. One of these tools, called "panoramic vision," a simple and unexpectedly helpful way to open your perspective without focusing, was further enhanced by the 360-degree view in Merigar's Temple of the Great Contemplation.

Lama Denys presented the key points of OMT in his native French rather than English, as requested by the participants. Thanks to the excellent and sensitive translation into Italian by Juri di Cerbo, who is also an OMT facilitator, we were able to hear everything in duplicate. Above and beyond the proximity of the two languages, Lama Denys spoke with such clarity, lucidity, and empathy that many of us had the surprising experience of being able to understand the French quite well.

The explanations given by Lama Denys were engaging and eloquent and yet concise, and in each session he made sure to actively involve all of the participants and encourage them to share their experiences. With expertise and understanding, he guided



ed us through exercises designed to demonstrate the state of presence in practice.

Open, altruistic mindfulness goes beyond the "first-generation mindfulness" goal of stress reduction and relaxation, mainly in that it enables us to develop a

ethical act, but it's not that the grandfather thought about it. He simply acted. Had he entertained moral considerations, the boy would have fallen to his death. The state of presence is capable of adapting to the situation as it is in an immediate way. Does that sound familiar?

By applying mindfulness in longer, mini, and micro pauses – in regular practice sessions and whenever we have a moment waiting in line, or anytime our phone tries to grab our attention with a ringtone or alert, and by steadily shortening the intervals between pauses, we just might find ourselves in a state of constant presence. Or at least more constant, more open, and more aware of others.

If you're interested in finding out more about OMT, visit www.openmindfulness.net. And if you'd like to participate in an OMT seminar, please don't hesitate to ask the Blue Gakyil of Merigar West to organize another in the future (office@dzogchen.it)



Photo courtesy of Thomas Simoen

new way of being that is attentive, open, and empathetic. Alternately applying three levels of mindfulness characterized by these three qualities, and doing so repeatedly and regularly, fosters what Lama Denys refers to as natural humanism or natural ethics, a state of altruism that is spontaneous and nondual.

To illustrate what is meant by natural ethics, he related a story of an old man who went to fetch water with his grandchild. While the grandfather was slowly drawing the bucket from the well, the little boy, sitting on the edge of the well, was gazing at the reflections on the surface of the water in the bucket. Mesmerized, he leaned farther and farther and was just about to fall into the well when the grandfather grabbed hold of him and pulled him to safety. You might say that this was an

Lama Denys is the direct spiritual heir of Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche and founder of the Sangha Rimay Community. Like the Dzogchen Community, the Sangha Rimay follows the Dzogchen teaching as transmitted by Garab Dorje and Guru Padmasambhava and later elaborated and diffused by the omniscient Longchenpa. About a decade ago, the two communities formalized their close tie through the Damdrog, or Samaya Fellowship, agreed to by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu and Lama Denys. As an external expression of the friendship, Karma Ling, one of the main centers of the Sangha Rimay in France, even has a smaller replica of the Merigar Gönpa. The connection has remained strong over the years, and in 2016 Chögyal Namkhai Norbu gave the name Shangpa Master to Lama Denys in recognition of the fact that he is a holder of the Shangpa Kagyüd lineage, an important but little known tradition started in the tenth century when the two jñanadakinis Niguma and Sukhasiddhi passed their teachings on to the mahasiddha Kyungpo Naljor.

The Vajra Dance of Space, *Khalong Dorje Kar*

Prima Mai

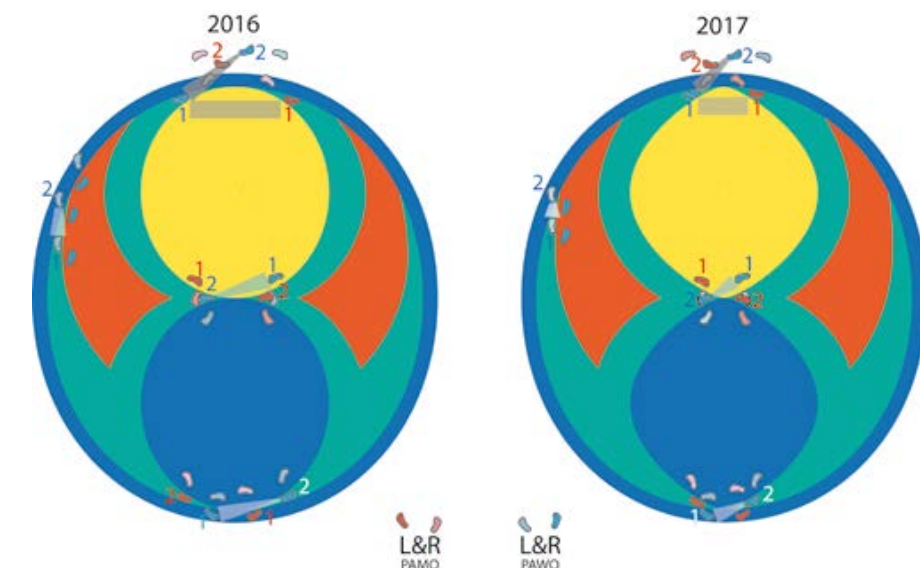
December 6, 2017

There was quite a short 4th study group on *Khalong Dorje Kar* at Merigar West at the end of September 2017. Our work is going ahead and there were several aspects of the Dance that we worked on. One of the main points we tried to discover better is how many participants can dance together on one *khalong* harmoniously, without having conflict when they meet and pass each other.

A second point was how the crossings are, or how we pass each other. There are several points at which male and female dancers meet, like in a mirror, and they have to pass by or cross each other very close in a particular way. Since the movement for both male and female is mirror-like, it's not so easy to understand how they can do it, and, how they can reach the right space on the *mandala*. We mainly have the crossings where male and female meet in what is called 'the upper door' where we enter the *khalong*, then in the center, in 'the lower door' and also when we enter 'the Garuda horns'. We still need more time to practice these crossings and deepen our understanding. But in general there were these two points that we had to discover how to do.

Then the third point was about how to accommodate better the male and female crossings by trying a modification in the drawing of the *khalong*. The *khalong* has very precise proportions that Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's root text indicates very clearly in a short chapter in the root text. Regarding the size it basically indicates an open defined unit of measurement for creating a size of the *Khalong* model which is actually determined by comparing the steps of an individual of our dimension with the movements of the Vajra Dance.

When I did the first diagrams based on the root text I created the total *khalong*, which is an oval shape, and the two inner *tigles* of clarity and emptiness that have the same shape as the outer *khalong* but whose proportions are reduced. However, this created a problem because we could not pass each other very well and we had to take impossibly long steps in order to



Photos by
Liane Gräf

reach the right place. This was because the movements are mirror-like. I reflected a lot on this point and thought that perhaps the female has a mirror-like movement but maybe does not have mirror-like steps, and that the female steps are towards the inner *khalong* while the male steps are towards the outer *khalong*. That would still be mirror-like movements but would connect the female more with the inner *khalong* in some places and the male always with the outer, similar to the Vajra Dance on the Earth Mandala. But the symbolic meaning of the total *khalong* itself is the total expanse of the Universe and beyond inner and outer, the mirror-like movement indicates that it is the non-dualistic aspect. So I was not really sure if that should be applied.

Then I thought that perhaps I would try to change the inner *tigles* and the horns in order to accommodate better the steps of

the males and females so that they would have shorter passages and would be able to do it. So I kept the same proportion and shape but I narrowed the upper and lower parts so it looks a little bit like a *vajra* now. But I'm not sure if that is all right because it says the *tigle* of emptiness and clarity even though the total *khalong* has an oval shape. It is not really round. So maybe it is ok for it to look like that.

And interestingly it also corresponds much better with Rinpoche's original drawing. So I was also very intrigued by the fact that I hadn't recognized that earlier. Rinpoche had this clarity observing the Dance in his dreams and with the application of the Dance I reached it very slowly by accident or experience although we still need to apply better the crossings with these modifications and I also need to verify it with Rinpoche.

» continued on the following page

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Then again we needed to check the number of dancers because thanks to some very helpful step calculations and simulations prepared by Maurizio Mingotti we discovered that probably 14 males and 14 females can dance together harmoniously, for a total of 28 dancers. Since Rinpoche mentions in the root text having observed around approximately 30 Dancers, I thought we might reach 18 males and 18 females in order to reach number 36. I've been studying sacred numerology a little bit and proportions and I thought 36 would be a good number because it creates 9 (3+6), which is a very important number. In the Simulation this number creates impossibly close passages. The further development of dancing in a cluster of *khalongs* might though still alter the number of present dancers in each *khalong*.

14 is also a very interesting number. 14 males and 14 females, 4 and 1 is 5, 5 and 5 make 10, which makes 1 (1+0) and everything starts from 1. This has a deep meaning as we know from following the teach-



ings of Rinpoche. As well 28 (2+8) makes 10 and creates again 1 (1+0). I thought that that is also an interesting correspondence. I don't have a mathematical mind and it is only in recent years that I have become again interested in sacred geometry and its significance in all creation. So we tried with 14 males and 14 females and we saw where the first couple meet on the *khalong*. We also decided that when the first couple dances and sings the two half counts and one step 'SAMI' (samita) of the Song of the Vajra, then the next couple enters the *khalong* and starts with 'E' (ema). That is the only way there can be 14 couples or 28 people on the *khalong*. In the same way when we finish, one couple dance SA (sasa), another couple dance MI (mimi), and another dance the final sound of the Nir-



manakaya RA. In that sense, one can see more or less also if one is in the right place, rather than being too early or too late or missing something.

We tried this using numbers. Each dancer wore a number, 1-14 on a red or blue background, so that we could see where male and female couples were dancing at different moments. However, we still don't know very well because sometimes we missed a step or hesitated and then things got mixed up. It was also interesting for me to observe that because it's like our physical body, how everything functions in the universe, the macrocosm and the microcosm. If the cells are all working harmoniously together, the body functions, it's healing, it's healthy. If one of those cells is out of order, it changes everything. And even though something manifests as well (comes out), it is not the totality. It is an aspect of the total. So I found that very interesting. Society and everything seems to reflect that. Another part that we worked on is about a possible way of singing and maybe also music in absence of specific indications in the root text. Adriano Clemente created a soundtrack with natural sounding instruments, which create a kind of symphony. So you hear the Song of the Vajra starting with one instrument – E MA KI RI KI RI, and when that instrument gets to SAMI TA, you hear another instrument starting with E MA KI RI KI RI. Then a third and then a fourth instrument join, like a canon. There are also some bells for the rhythm and some bells when the next people enter the *khalong* so it helps. And if one is able to catch one's instrument, and stay with it, it helps to sing with it and not lose your steps. This soundtrack really creates a very harmonious and beautiful sound.

And we also tried to sing the Song of the Vajra. On the last day of the study group we all sat in a circle with groups of 2 or 3 people sitting together. We also tried to make 14 groups. One group started to sing and had to remain on a base tone of A in the key 'C' (So) on which we all started with the sound of E MA. Then each group sang its Song of Vajra, like a canon. When one group got to SAMI TA, the next group would start. It was an interesting experience to remain in one's sound, remaining present in one's condition, and integrating with all the other sounds, but without losing one's sound. This might also be an interesting part of the practice. Maybe singing and dancing and music has originated from a natural knowing to recreate or regenerate harmony within oneself and in a group. The inner harmony has a healing aspect and also in the outer part, in the manifestation, because clarity arises and you become aware of your own condition and the condition of others.

This aspect of opening the heart towards understanding how our condition works is very interesting.

So these few days of the September study group were very rich in discovery but now we have to go also more into the technical part and really learn how to do the crossings correctly and try to keep the sound with the steps and be, as much as possible, in the right place. This part is very important in order to verify in the best possible way the corresponding size and design of the *khalong* and possibly the number of Dancers. The study group was only four days and we did the whole Dance of the Song of the Vajra in that time, so naturally some parts still need to be made more precise. So we are at this point. Now I hope to verify with Rinpoche that our development is corresponding and that the shape of the *khalong* is correct and I am planning then to update the little e-booklet ('Working Notes and Essential Diagrams for the Study of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's Vajra Dance of Space of the Song of the Vajra') with diagrams for females, so we will have a good booklet also in print to study from. Everyone will be able to learn the pathway very well from the booklet. If one knows the pathway then goes dancing with others, it is easier and we can go directly to these parts of how we cross and we don't need to explain the pathway so much and lose time. In that sense our study would develop more quickly because with each

study group we always have to start from the beginning again.

Now I see that many people want to develop *khalongs* in their places. I've already seen a *khalong* made on the base of the similar symbol of the Vajra Dance *longsal*. Somebody thought that this was the *khalong*, but it is not correct. We should not make a copy like this. It is not any *khalong*. There are precise proportions, even the

on the back of an earth mandala and in Merigar outside on a cement platform for the solar mandala. Also in Khandroling we plan to make one for the smaller indoor gōnpa. However, one cannot dance well the majestic *tsom* movements or dance correctly together on such a small size and it has little use, beside memorizing the pathway, which, with little effort one can memorize also studying the booklet. In order to

mations etc. It is very refined work and our post production person is a professional who wishes things to be done well. Anyway, the work is going ahead and we are at a good point. The tutorial of the Vajra Dance That Benefits Beings is almost ready and should come out in February. We are also working on deciding the best ways for the distribution. There will be more than one way. We will still have a physical DVD and possibly better also a USB stick but we actually think that these tutorials should go online.

It is important to remember that these are teachings and connected to *samaya*, the protection of the guardians of the teachings. There are ways to protect these teachings, if, for example, we put the tutorials online, we could connect them to a single name, password, and Dzogchen Community membership number.

Shang Shung Foundation is also in the process of developing an educational platform with the idea to have online courses. So that will also be the platform for the Vajra Dance tutorials.

If people learn the Vajra Dances with these tutorials they always have to verify with an instructor. Rinpoche indicated clearly that one should do a real course with a live instructor and we also all understand that there is more to the Vajra Dance than only technical things to learn. In any case working with one's circumstances if one already starts to learn with a tutorial they should then verify with a course or with an instructor and will also receive a certificate.

The teachings and our choice to apply a path has, though, nothing to do with becoming or making certificates or diplomas.

Personally I still feel that we are developing and discovering about the quality of movements and timing and the way of dancing together. When we recorded for the tutorials, we had to break in sequences, often also repeating one sequence. The Tutorial can be useful to indicate and learn basic steps and movements or to remember or refresh memory. For deepening and being up to date, it is important as it is in general for all type of dances, to learn correctly with an authorized Instructor. It has real benefit. The best protection is probably being aware of our real motivation and intention. ©



measure can vary a bit and we have to be careful how we develop this. This has to be a bit coordinated and correspond so I ask everybody to respect that and wait because we are in the study phase and it has not been 100% established yet. So we should understand that the Dance of Space is still a study and the *khalong* may still change.

We will have our next study group in Dzamling Gar after the Drubchen of Mandarava and *Tsalung* teachings with Fabio Andrico March 12–18, 2017 and another study group in early summer at Merigar West. We would like to make this period of study a little longer because in the first days, many people just want to learn the steps and pathway. Under my supervision we have made a *khalong* in Khandroling (Massachusetts, USA) where last summer we met and had a short demonstration and experience together. Some of us became quite expert in guiding the making of a *khalong* and guiding the pathway and basic steps.

It is possible also to make small training *khalong*, just for learning the pathway, but it's not possible to really apply in a group well the Vajra Dance of Space together. We have in Dzamling Gar such a small *khalong*

dance well on a functioning *khalong* in our dimension, we need a space of minimum 15m diameter. We can also prepare an outdoor *khalong* simply indicated by a string made *khalong* which is being developed by Fanni and also in Naples they have found some promising material for a *khalong* that is easy to transport. It can be made of small rocks or chalk on an evenly prepared grass floor for example, and even a cluster of 4 *khalongs* with many practitioners dancing together. ©

Vajra Dance Tutorials

I'd like to give a little update regarding the Vajra Dance tutorials. Firstly we would like to thank all our sponsors. They should not worry and they have made a very good investment. We are working on them. Unfortunately due to the many changes in the structure of the Shang Shung Foundation the person doing our post production is very much involved in that and has a great deal of work. The work of the Vajra Dance tutorials is not just putting clips together but working on the lights of the different cameras, putting the audio in the correct place, mixing and ani-

A Week of Kumar Kumari Yantra Yoga at Zhenphenling

Constance Soehnlen

As part of their unit on Healthy Habits, the 1st grade classes at Ambrit International School in Rome, decided to travel outside their school, to a place in the city that promotes physical activity and well-being.

Zhenphenling, near the Pyramide-Ostiense area, was that PLACE and was a fine choice by the teachers for the children. Last year, I visited each of the classrooms (3 in number) for a 20 minute introduction to Kumar-Kumari Yantra Yoga for children. It was a bit difficult due to limited space and time, but still the teachers and children were able to see what can be done in those conditions.

Zhenphenling instead could easily host each class with 15 children and their teachers. The three classes came for individual morning visits over the week of November 12th to the 17th. Each group of children seemed to have a different energy as they entered, and the yoga lesson was adapted to each group, those calm, those full of energy, and others quite joyous.

As the children were taking off their shoes at the entrance, one boy asked, 'Is this your home?' Another child commented 'I like this smell, and still another, commenting on the scent of incense 'me too, it's like my home, when I go to Vietnam.'

All the children were quite taken by Zhenphenling's mandala painted on its wooden floor, used for Vajra Dance. The mandala seemed to hold a magical quality, a 'Wow' for them, expressed by the boys and girls as they stepped onto it.

One group of children entered quietly and sat on its most outer curved blue line. Another group of children began to move slowly, counter clockwise around its concentric circles. A third group cartwheeled and danced on its surface.

The children gave their own ideas about mandala' colours. The blue, green, red, yellow and white circles represented 'fire', 'water' and 'wind', 'the sky', sun, grass, 'calm' and 'anger', its shape is 'with circles and triangles, 'its the World'.

When the Kumar Kumari lesson began, each child had their own yoga mat and lots of space to follow warm-ups, the beginning



breathing, followed by various tsigjong, lungsang, the tsandul movements and yantras. Different balancing poses were tried out too – be a tree, bird, frog, crane. The lesson ended with Kumar-Kumari's finishing exercise and resting on the mat afterwards.

Replenished after a snack of fruit, biscuits and fresh water, the children left smiling and saying, 'I really enjoyed this' 'I hope we can come again.' And I can say the same. What a pleasant experience, so interesting for the children, to repeat time and time again at Zhenphenling. ©





Welcome to the Fire Bird Children

The Mirror has just received a lovely image of some of the many children born to parents in the International Dzogchen Community in the year of the Fire Bird (February 27, 2017 to February 15, 2018). Our very best wishes go to these new beings and their parents – and those still to arrive in the Fire Bird year – for a happy and healthy childhood.

The well-known Chinese astrologer, Raymond Lo says of children born in the year of the Fire Bird:

The yin fire on Rooster is also a rare year of both Nobleman and Academic stars. This means every baby born in 2017 will automatically possess such good stars. Nobleman will make a person's life smooth with support from others, and academic star is symbol of intelligence and strong appetite for knowledge and study. Such stars are essential for successful life today and such year with both Nobleman and academic star only appears twice in the 60 year cycle – yin fire Rooster year and yin water Rabbit year. So it is a very good year to give birth. The next chance with similar good year is 2023 yin water Rabbit year. ©

Fire at Shangpa Karma Ling Buddhist Center in Savoie, France

On the night of Thursday to Friday, December 1st, the old Chartreuse of St-Hugon at Karma Ling Buddhist center in France was the victim of a terrible fire.

Fortunately, there were no casualties.

We warmly thank all those who have generously offered to help us on site. But for the moment the center is inaccessible for reasons of security and logistics. So please postpone your visit for the time being. In addition, we are currently forced to cancel all scheduled activities at the Shangpa Karma Ling Center for the next few weeks.

We will keep you informed of the situation by newsletters which we will publish regularly on our website. <http://www.unirimay.org/?lang=en>

Fortunately, no one was injured. Of the 30 people staying at Karma Ling that night, luckily none was in the Charterhouse. Residents and retreatants on site quickly gathered around the Stupa to witness this sad spectacle, helplessly watching while firefighters tried their best to slow the progress of the fire, without success.

The other buildings in the area – Dewachen, the retreat centers, the cottages and the House of Wisdom – did not suffer any damage.

More than a building, a heritage

Long before the recent construction of the House of Wisdom, the Charterhouse was the central building of the Karma Ling Institute. Formerly a monastery housing a Carthusian community, it was bought in the 1970s and was completely renovated by members and friends of the community. Since 1979, the Charterhouse has continued to transform and beautify itself to better accommodate the ever-growing community. Anyone who has stayed at the Domaine d'Avallon has fallen under the charm of this stately stone building dating back to 1676.

A New Start

Many of us are heartbroken by the events of this first long night of December, but there is no time to waste. We have already



set up a crisis unit to deal with the many issues we will have to face.

As Shangpa Master Denys has said, this event reminds us of the reality of impermanence. It also reminds us of the values of friendship and solidarity that connect us and have manifested themselves with great focus in this very place, as well as among all of you who have given your attention and support.

Of course, the most important thing today is to maintain our spirit and motivation. If we approach it well, this event can be the occasion of a new start, and the contribution of each and everyone will be precious.

Temporary interruption of all activities

We have been forced to cancel all activities scheduled at the Shangpa Karma Ling Institute for the next few weeks. We will inform you in the coming days about the duration of this interruption.

How to help?

For the moment, no additional personnel are necessary on site, because we are busy reorganizing the life of the residents in the absence of a kitchen and with only minimal electricity and gas supplies.

In addition, in the absence of revenue in the coming months, financial assistance is welcome. This will help us to meet the most urgent needs at first, and subsequently help us to ensure the continuity of Shangpa Karma Ling's activities.

Go to the online donation form – <https://admin.rimay.net/Faire-un-don-en-ligne.html>

We also have an immediate need for equipment and material, and we are preparing a plan of action which we hope will be informed by your proposals and talents. To notify us of your willingness to par-

ticipate or of any materials you can make available, please fill out the following form:

<http://www.unirimay.org/formulaire-daide-ligne/>

We would especially like to thank the firefighters and police officers who worked tirelessly over the past few days to control and secure the Avalon site.

We are also very touched by the expressions of empathy by all the members and supporters of the community to the residents and retreatants present at the time of the fire, and we wish to reassure and thank you on their behalf.

Finally, we wish to thank Shangpa Master Denys for the presence and support he brings us despite the distance. His clarity and lucidity in this difficult moment are a precious help to guide us and to envision a prosperous future.

May everything be auspicious, from heart to heart.

Warmly,

The Avalon Team



This message has been copied from the UniRimay website.

There is a special spiritual relationship or *damtroq* between Shangpa Master Denys and Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, and their two Communities, the Dzogchen Community and the Shangpa Rimay Community.

Founding of the Italian Association of Tibetan, Himalayan and Mongolian Studies

Margherita Pansa

From 12 to 15 September 2017, the founding conference of the Italian Association of Tibetan, Himalayan and Mongolian Studies (AISTHiM) was held at the Scuola di Alta Formazione of the Orientale University of Naples in Procida, Italy. The Association was created with the aim of promoting the study and knowledge of Tibetan and Himalayan civilizations in Italy, supporting research, publishing scientific studies, translations and works for the general public on Tibetan, Himalayan and Mongolian civilizations, and organizing conferences and collaborating with academic institutions, in order to fill a deeply felt void among Italian scholars.

The founding conference, funded by the Orientale University of Naples and ISMEO (Associazione Internazionale di Studi sul Mediterraneo e l'Oriente), was organized in a number of panels with very varied themes that showed the brilliance of the panorama of studies on Tibet and the Himalayas in Italy and with Italians abroad. It ranged from the history of doctrines to divination, from art to medicine, archeology, medicine, philology and philosophy to the most contemporary aspects of Tibet, Nepal and the Himalayan chain.

All of this was organized and promoted by Prof. Giacomella Orofino (L'Orientale University of Naples), who introduced the initiative: "For years, I have been thinking that there have been many Italian scholars of Tibetan, Himalayan and Mongol civilizations, and it is time to create a network to connect them, so that they can exchange their own research and share their interests. The number of Italian scholars who participated in the conference, in most cases young people, and the quality of their interventions have convinced me that this

new association can play an important role in the history of the studies of these disciplines in Italy."

In addition to Prof. Giacomella Orofino, Prof. Elena De Rossi Filibeck (Sapienza University of Rome), Prof. Erberto Lo Bue (University of Bologna), and Prof. Donatella Rossi (Sapienza University of Rome) made up the scientific committee. The organizing committee was composed of Dr. Emanuela Garatti (École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris/Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität,

Munich), Dr. Valentina Punzi (L'Orientale University of Naples), Dr. Carmen Simioli (L'Orientale University of Naples) and Dr. Davide Torri (Heidelberg University).

We can only wish every good to this newborn association and for success in its goals!

You can find more information on the aisthim.it website and on its Facebook page. ©



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TIBETANI, HIMALAYANI E MONGOLI



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Merigar East Camping Extension – Behind The Scenes

Alexandru Anton,
Geko of Merigar East

Dear everyone, there is some news coming from Merigar East!

Recently we completed the first step in extending the camping's capacity and increasing its coziness. A brand new kitchen has been set up and is now waiting to get its final touch. It will replace the older kitchen – which, due to the strong manifestation of the elements here, is crumbling down.

You can have a quick look at the timelapse skillfully created by Aleksandr Volokhov (aka Mr. Sasha): https://drive.google.com/file/d/itUNvVYADQkpNoOl_uDQ8PBXwZ_ONtZW/

We were lucky enough to be coordinated by Lubomir Michna from Slovakia, who dedicated much time and energy for this project and was an inspiration for us all. After launching a call for karmayogis, they quickly appeared, animating the Gar with their diversity and joyful presence: Tamara from Uzbekistan, Metogma from Buryatia, Denis and Sasha from Ukraine, Feri, Mihai and Alex from Romania.

We had quite a short time to complete this phase of the project, so we started working early in the morning and finished around sunset. There was good weather generally – with only a few periods when it was virtually impossible to do anything. When working outside in Merigar East, one can really start to feel and appreciate the elements – especially when you have to hold still a big piece of wood and the wind is blowing like crazy.

It was a special experience – being part of a team of practitioners dedicating themselves a couple of weeks to a concrete task. We worked together, we ate together, we went shopping or walking around the area – and many connections were born between us. Merigar East has such a vast area (4.5 ha) compared to the few buildings where things are going on – and this creates a strong sense of intimacy and of being together. You could, of course, have some space for yourself, or you could just run to the nearby beach, listen to the seagulls and watch the waves – but you're still together



with other Vajra brothers and sisters in the middle of nowhere.

And then there is the whole process of working together in this concrete material environment, splitting tasks, doing some things for the first time and getting over some limitations, having totally new experiences of coordinating your body, energy and mind in a most concrete way – if you don't coordinate well, the material result will look bad, and you will have to do it all over again. Like a free play while being responsible to play well. Plus the communication going on, negotiating between ourselves to take into account our different capacities, but also motivating, supporting and challenging each other. Expressing opinions, making decisions together, watching the construction evolve.

And all the fun: there is no grumpy boss giving orders, we know we are all volunteering and doing our best. Being ourselves and encouraging each other to stay open and free of tensions. And then, this work has a special flavour: we are enjoying contributing together to the community, to the Gar, to a place where the Teachings transmitted by our Master continue and develop...

Then add all the surprises that come along the way and all the gestures of kindness and generosity that you can now really appreciate. Imagine waking up in the morning, having a quick breakfast and then going off to the working area, time passing by quickly (especially when you can hear the khaita joyful dances filling the space), everyone focusing on their activity, working with the body, getting a little tired, getting hungry like wolves and then stepping into the otherworldly mesmerizing smell of hot, delicious food cooked by Metogma and Tamara (many times they also prepared some desert!).

The ladies also offered us sessions of kunye massage and therapies, which felt

like a blessing after working with the body for the entire day. In this sense, I could say we were well taken care of and we were looking forward to every new day.

Did you get a glimpse? Do you want to contribute? We are waiting for you in spring if you want to jump in and participate in the next episode! Until then we are grateful for any donation you wish to make to support this project: https://dzogchen.ro/component/option,com_zj_donation/Itemid,101/controller,donate/id,20/task,donation/

Hope to see you soon!



Rinchenling Moscow New Gakyil 2017–18 Approved



In Moscow, on November 4th 2017, a meeting started with a warm atmosphere of tea drinking. At this meeting new candidates for the 2017–2018 Gakyil were presented. Each of the candidates had different and useful talents, however, only nine people were required for the Gakyil. As a result, the new members are the following:

Blue: Anna Kobilchenko, Evgenia Edutova, Andrey Shishlov

Red: Larisa Kortunova, Mikhail Kurochkin, Lev Sedov

Yellow: Galina Evsikova, Marina Samaya, Ylya Shirobokov

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu has approved a new Gakyil. Its work started with preparations for the Worldwide Transmission on the anniversary of Adzom Drugpa on November 13.

Contact: moscow.ling@gmail.com ☉

Kumbhaka & the 7th Lojong Course, and Mandarava Tsalung Course

with Fabio Andrico
at Samtengar in China,
October 10–13, 14–20, 2017



Upon returning from a trip to Kham after the intensive month-long Yantra Yoga Teacher Training, Fabio Andrico dove right back into action in Samtengar with Courses on Kumbhaka & 7th Lojong and Mandarava Tsalung.

In total, over fifty participants came for the teaching. Since some of the students had not had any prior experience with Yantra Yoga or Kumbhaka in general, Fabio dedicated the first part of the course on 7th Lojong to developing the experience of complete breathing and holding through various exercises and group practices. By having concrete experience students were able to develop some capacity for complete breathing and holding of Kumbhaka. Fabio then went at length to give detailed instructions of each of the three practices of the 7th Lojong referencing to the Precious Vase text and the text on Teachings on Lojong, Rushen and Semdzins, as well as related notes from other retreats.

After a short one-day break, the learning continued with a week of Mandarava Tsalung training. Morning sessions were dedicated to Mandarava short practice with Chüdlen, Sogthig, Tsalung practice and some instructions. In the afternoons the class went over precise indications

from the root text, Rinpoche's commentaries and notes from various retreats and practice training. One persistent theme throughout these kumbhaka practices, as indicated by Rinpoche, was to not force oneself, but at the same time try to develop one's capacity. As our master repeatedly emphasized in the text, the crucial point for these visualization and Tsalung practices is to really get to the essence rather than going too much into conceptual details. Another important message that

Fabio also stressed is how the practice is connected to its Transmission and instructions, not simply some knowledge and methods derived only from books, and so one is advised to practice accordingly.

The joyful eleven days went by like a breeze, especially in the last few days when the temperature really dropped and people were able to put their Kumbhaka practice to the test! The course ended auspiciously on the first day of the new moon with a Mandarava long practice with Sogthig and Tsalung. Rinpoche and Rosa's good health was always the wish in our hearts. ☉



New Gakyil Tsegyalgar East

Selected in December, 2017 and approved
by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu

Blue Gakyil: Miranda Shannon, Nancy Paris
Red Gakyil: Bret Bourman
Yellow Gakyil: Ed Matheny, Al Daggett,
Diane Kramer ©

Birthday Greeting Photo for Chögyal Namkhai Norbu.
Photo by J Shannon



Namgyalgar Presence and Awareness Retreat

November 2017

The recent five day 'Presence & Awareness' retreat held at Namgyalgar from November 10–14 was a resounding success enjoyed by almost 70 people. This is the first time such a retreat has been held at Namgyalgar which was arranged following the example of Merigar West and other Gars and Lings who held similar 'sangha retreats' when Rinpoche's schedule was canceled this year.

The focus of the retreat was cultivating presence and awareness in daily life and a dynamic program led by a total of ten instructors was offered. This included Santi Maha Sangha teaching and practice, introductory Vajra Dance and Yantra Yoga for beginners, and practice and refining sessions for those experienced. In addition there was Khaita joyful dancing, morning Sang and evening Chöd practice.

On the last evening there was a Ganapuja followed by a humorous fundraising auction, in conjunction to a separate 'silent auction', which people donated generously to. Many items auctioned belonged to Santi Maha Sangha teacher Elise Stutchbury.

Also auctioned were the curly ends of the moustache of Yantra Yoga instructor Sean Read which was trimmed as people bid!

The coming together of the Community of practitioners enabled the participants to nourish and strengthen their practice and vajra connection, and was inspiring and encouraging for all, near and far, who follow the Teachings.

A heartfelt thank-you to all the instructors and to everyone who contributed to the smooth running of the retreat, as well as to the generous sponsors.

And immense gratitude to our Master to whom the retreat was dedicated. ©

A Walk Along The Ancient Paths

Oni McKinstry

Photos by Oni McKinstry and Fabio Andrico

When you go to China, there are three things you must have before you leave your home country – 1) toilet paper (enough for your trip) 2) WeChat app for communicating inside China 3) a VPN for communicating outside China. Anything else, can be bought very cheaply in China, fake or authentic versions of whatever you desire. How about a fake Toyota Landcruiser or a fake BMW?

Three days before we left Australia for China, I received an email from Fabio Andrico asking us if we wanted to accompany him on a trip to Gyarong and Adzom Gar after the month of Yantra Yoga at Samtengar. Who could say no? With the help of Sean who speaks fluent Mandarin, we scrambled to re-organize air tickets to Chengdu and back to Australia ten days later than the original itinerary.

A day after the month-long Yantra Yoga residential was finished, we departed for Chengdu in the late evening. The flight was delayed and it was 3am when we finally slumped into our luxurious hotel beds courtesy of Mr. Wayne. The next day was spent trying to find a new driver (due to numerous plan changes) to take us to Western China and purchasing supplies from the famous Carrefour supermarket.

Chengdu is a huge city of roughly 14 million people, at 500m above sea level and reputedly the fourth most polluted city in China. I cannot verify this but looking at the pinky brown band of dense haze hanging above, feeling the acrid air tickling my throat, it is undeniable. When we departed westward, it took us an hour and a half to actually leave the city environs.

Our driver, Xiao Ni, didn't speak English, so Sean was assigned to the front passenger seat to keep him company while Fabio and I settled comfortably into the back seat of the thankfully-not-too-ancient Mitsubishi Pajero. We had a loose plan of visiting places connected to our lineage Master and a rough timeframe of seven days to achieve it. The driver had only been to one of the locations on our itinerary, so for him it was also a new adventure. We didn't require any extra visas as technically we would still be in China and hadn't even pre-booked any



A piece of manuscript.

hotel reservations. Fabio and I relaxed in the back seat, munching on fruit, Chinese dates and snapping photos out the window while Sean practiced his guitar and entertained the driver.

The roads were so gently inclined that it was only by checking the altimeter in the car that I knew we were steadily climbing in altitude. We were instantly in Gyarong country, an idyllic countryside with fantastic architecture of houses and farms. We drove along the G137 which is a highway of two lanes and, if you haven't experienced the Chinese driving style, then you definitely have not seen everything! Honking the horn is a way of letting other drivers know you are about to pass them, often on the inside and across the center line. Often, it was better not to look and pretend to gaze out the side windows instead. We simply surrendered to our fate.

Hurting towards Ma'erkhang, because the driver, fueled on Chinese Red Bull, drove like a bat out of hell, we passed giant concrete tubes implanted next to the road like giant pins, some had slabs of flat concrete on them, others were just waiting to be connected. China – under construction! The existing roads did indeed need a lot of repair but this massive expansion of the highway foretells a huge army of vehicles on the move, and it made me a little gloomy. In a year or so, this landscape would be unrecognizable.

Suddenly, we did a hairpin turn, up a steep winding concrete drive, now at

3000 m. We came to a stop at the end of the road. The driver told us we had arrived at Vairocana's cave – Piluzhena in Chinese – near the Suomo River Canyon, a few kilometers before the small village of Zhuokejizhen. A narrow, winding, painted red metal staircase was the only way down the cliff to the cave. Holding on the handrail we applied complete mindfulness for each step as we clung on the staircase hugging the hillside with nothing between us and the ground hundreds of meters below but space. The temple and retreat huts were only built about 40 years ago, so the cave must have been quite deserted and isolated. The past merged imperceptibly with the present. I remember that I was in an absolute state of awe, and still am so I hope

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Vairocana's cave.



Road through the mountains.



Stupa of Adzom Drugpa.

» continued from previous page

the photos will best describe what I experienced with my senses there.

We had started on a course of some ghastly herbal medicine to prevent altitude sickness but by the time we arrived at our first hotel stop, my headache was so bad that I couldn't eat dinner. The Diamox took four hours to take affect and when it did, it was such a relief to feel normal. Sean had gone out with the driver for hotpot and Baijiu, the infamous \$2 alcohol that would rot your gut in no time. He also came back with tales of dancing in the street to Tibetan songs with beautiful Tibetan girls, songs that he recognized and dances that he knew. Fancy that!

After a traditional breakfast of liquidy rice congee and hard-boiled eggs at 7am the next morning, we set off for a ten hour day of driving - westward and upward. This is when the roll of toilet paper comes in handy- pardon the pun. Along the roadside there are public toilets. These are square concrete blocks often surrounded by piles of refuse and stench built randomly. The first time I saw one of these, I was quite excited but was quickly dissuaded to scramble into the bushes with my toilet paper. These were moments when I truly wished I could pee standing up. To cope with the altitude, we had to keep our fluid intake up, and this meant very frequent "miao miao" stops. The driver at times seemed exasperated at how often we needed to relieve ourselves, but I think he was secretly glad for the chance to smoke a cigarette and gulp down his Red Bull fuel.

The first pass was Kwan Yin Qiao on Sanpa Mountain, at 4200m, the rain was light and gentle on our faces and the tem-

perature not too cold at around 3-4°C. Winding our way around the mountainous region, taking a right turn at Luhuo, keeping alongside the Daqu river we headed towards Ganzi, at 3200m. We got very excited when we saw our first yak train. Apparently they are rarely seen below 3000m.

Ganzi was our first truly Tibetan town and it felt like a wild west sort of place, with cowboy hats, boots and all. I insisted on having a Tibetan lunch so we found a proper Tibetan cafe that served tsampa, butter tea and boiled beef, or what looked like beef but tasted like bland leather belts. My jaw muscles were too weak to get through more than a piece the size of a dollar coin. But the tea and tsampa were delicious and nourishing. Ganzi is a very spacious town with wide streets and lots of parks and trees. There must have been a large college in town because we saw a lot of young people with books and in uniform. Our hotel was directly in front of a children's playground with a large round half wall with a tree in the middle. That evening, a large group of local Tibetan folk gathered to dance, mostly circle dances around this tree. Weather permitting, this is a regular occurrence. Sean of course, joined in the dance. He was the only Westerner but that didn't seem to disturb anyone, they simply looked a little bemused. I could barely move a muscle so I sat next to a couple of older men, watching languidly. In this circle, there were people of all ages and gender, the youngest at a guess maybe eight years old and the oldest, possibly in their 70s, some dressed in traditional Tibetan clothes and others in the most fashionable garb of the day. We were told that here in

Ganzi, Tibetan children could learn Tibetan in their schools as well as Mandarin.

The next day, setting off at 7am after the customary breakfast we began to make our way up and over the mountain passes towards the village of Maqiong. There was mountain range after mountain range, different shapes and sizes, mostly rock and scree, clouds in between bouts of brilliant blue sky and bright sunshine. We passed the beginning of a tunnel being built into the mountain that in a couple of years would emerge on the other side to join up with the road towards the Tibetan Autonomous Region, cutting the journey by over two hours. All along the winding road, there were giant electric pylons standing on the hillside like gleaming steel sentry. There is no more wilderness here.



At the T-junction, we turned right towards Achaxiang, then veered off the main road to follow the river towards Maqiongxiang at 3800m. We could tell we were arriving somewhere important because we began to see thousands of prayer flags covering a majestic rocky hillside pockmarked with caves across the river. This exposed cliffside is the place where Adzom Drugpa had discovered many *termas*. A lit-



Ruin of retreat hut of Adzom Drugpa.



Vairocana's footprint.

tle further on, we picked up a Tibetan man hitch-hiking and he took us up a rough road full of big pot holes towards the top of the hillside. Neither the driver nor we knew how to find Adzom Gar, and there was no way we could have found this road without his help. Stupas came into view, white tents seen perched on the slope and monastic rooftops gleaming in gold appeared and all of a sudden we had arrived in the middle of this large settlement. It was quite an emotional moment for all of us.

The abbot, A Ren, a direct descendant of Adzom Drugpa, had already entertained a group of students of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu only a few weeks prior (see Will Shea's article on his trip to Eastern Tibet). He took us into the monastery's kitchen and generously plied us with butter tea flavored with



Nyagla Padma Duldul.



The temple to Nyagla Padma Duldul.

me was the visit to the temple that Adzom Drugpa's son, Gyurme Dorje, had built over one hundred and fifty years ago which still stands undamaged. Unlocking the huge

footprint in rock. Gyurme Dorje himself had given Dzogchen teachings in this very room. We asked permission to sit for a little while here to breathe in the sacred atmosphere. I stumbled out of the temple in an altered state of mind.

From Achaxiang, we took the Ganbai Road to Anzixiang. We were not certain if we were on the right road or how long it would take to get here. Before the driver was almost ready to turn back, Anzi township appeared on our right and we came to a stop at a police guard post as described by the abbot of Adzom Gar. We had heard that some folks were turned away and not permitted to go up the driveway behind the barrier blocking it. We were also apprehensive about being allowed through and then having to walk up the long driveway in our altitude challenged state. The thought of not being able to make it by foot was also rather depressing. Fabio and I watched Sean and the driver talking animatedly to the policeman, dressed in black t-shirt and jeans, for what seemed like hours. Imagine

» continued on the following page



Left: Sean dancing in Ganzi.

Right: In the kitchen of Adzom Gar.

tsampa, fried dough sticks, freshly made yogurt and sweet, boiled *troma*.

Then he personally gave us a tour of his monastery, pointing out the retreat huts of Adzom Drugpa, and those of his son and his daughter. We slowly walked to the stupas and reverently paid homage to the statues, touching our heads and feeling a sense of thread somehow connecting us beyond space and time. The highlight for

wooden doors with a large key, the abbot took us into the dark unlit hall, up a wide but shallow wooden staircase, along a narrow corridor where there were two monk's boxes alongside one wall, then through a hanging curtain into an inner Gonpa room. There were stupas of the lineage masters adorned with huge pieces of turquoise, Dzi and coral, behind glass cases, as well as a fantastic statue of Adzom Drugpa and his



Yarchen Gar settlement.

» continued from previous page

our delight, when they jumped back into the car, and the policeman lifted the barrier just high enough for us to sneak under. We couldn't believe our luck and even though we tried to offer the policeman some money, he flatly refused. At the end of the road, there was another barrier across a shorter but steeper drive that led to a small temple whose roof we could barely see when we looked up to the sky. A large group of young Tibetan people were almost running up the drive so we caught up with them. Or rather the driver, Sean and Fabio did. I was lifting my heavy legs, one in front of the other, trying to gain ground, while my heart pumped loudly in my ears. The local monks had come to perform a puja as it was 10th day and as soon as they finished, everyone left. Soon, I found myself alone in the inner temple dominated by the huge white stupa. The room buzzed with sound, light and rays. My senses were blasted, thoughts shattered like shards of glass. All I remember then and now is this photo of the great Yogi.

Exhilarated, we thought to complete this wondrous day with a visit to Yarchen Gar after lunch. The 'Gar' area is massive, on a scale unimagined. A vast hillside of grass, no trees, only sky and earth. And giant golden statues, stupas and major construction all around. We sat on the hill

where the golden statue of Guru Rinpoche sits, and looked down in amazement at the settlement below. This huge island separated by a small river is divided like a coffee bean, with thousands of monks and nuns living in self-built huts, segregated in each half. The plains stretched out behind them for miles into the horizon, only grassy hills and sky as far as you could see. The touristy part of the Gar looked a bit gaudy and manufactured and felt rather incongruous with the real activity of those monastics below. We circumambulated at the main prayer wheels where each wheel seemed to weigh a ton and creaked slowly with each hand that turned it.

We were definitely feeling contented and satisfied on the drive back. We oohed and aahed at the awe inspiring mountain view, with the light of the setting sun changing from pink to lilac to purple atop the ranges. On our final descent from the high pass, dark clouds appeared and within an instant, rain and hailstones as large as marbles bounced on the car and along the roads, turning day into night. It felt like the ultimate blessing to a magnificent day. We concluded the day with a short Ganapuja later that evening back at the hotel.

The weather on the trip had been incredibly benevolent, with brilliant sunshine and fresh soothing breezes. Since we still had a couple of extra days to spare,

we decided to go look for Vimalamitra's mountain in Danba. We retraced our steps back to Luhuo and took the S303 south and then east toward Danba. We passed through the famous Minyak grasslands, which at this time of year were not abundant in wild flowers but nomadic camps and yak. The nomads ran the horse riding camps for the tourists with Tibetan horses saddled in traditional blankets. We passed through many police checkpoints but they only wanted to take our photos with our passports. In Danba, at 2050m, everything felt pleasant and easy. This is the heart of Gyarong country where the three rivers meet to give birth to the Dardo river. The landscape is lush with abundant fields and orchards. The Gyarong people wear traditional clothes with brightly colored head-dresses and lots of gold jewelry. They are darker skinned and stocky and the women have beautiful round faces.

That night we stayed at a Tibetan guesthouse, sharing a room with five beds in it, all for the three of us. Thinking that this would be a small and cosy guesthouse, we were quite taken aback to find ourselves at a muddy car park with a whole bunch of Chinese tourists with large suitcases. We had to leave the car there and lugged our essentials down a path among the maize fields and vegetable terraces to a traditional Gyarong building built on the



Yarchen Gar.

hillside. There was not much to see as the sun had already set. We woke up the next morning to a breathtaking view of the valley with houses like stone castles hugging the slopes and terraced orchards and fields. Our guesthouse was one of many all clustered together and it was obviously a large establishment geared towards mass tourism. That morning the terraces were

descent, we were blessed with a soft light rain freshening our faces.

We passed the tallest watchtower in Gyarong in almost its original state and a policeman at a check point came out to offer us perfectly ripe, locally grown apples in apology for delaying our journey. Being autumn, the pear and apple trees were laden with fruit and the air smelled of freshly



Tallest watch tower in Gyarong.

touch rock imprints in person! We had gone full circle and were brimming with glee.

To redeem itself, China offered us one last public toilet experience. Near Wench-



Danba girl.

crowded with tourists clicking away at the scenic view.

We crossed the river to arrive at a village called Three Family Meeting Place. After an hour and a half tramping through the village houses and then a stony path up the hill, we stopped at an abandoned hamlet. Here we tried to glimpse Mo'er-do, Vimalamitra's mountain but the clouds stubbornly hid it from view. Mo'erdo is also sacred to Bön practitioners and the young manager of our guesthouse who sidelines as a mountaineer frequently take guided groups up to the top. There are numerous caves two days' hike in. This trek definitely goes on the bucket list to do. Again on our



Our guesthouse in Danba.

threshed Sichuan peppers. Verandas were covered in bunches of maize and red chilies drying in the sun.

We headed north, stopping at Jinchuan for the night before picking up the G317 again retracing our steps back to Piluzhena. It was like returning to visit your favorite grandmother. We almost ran down the steel staircase in our rush to the Gonpa jutting out under the cave roof. There were only the monks who live in retreat there and us. The young head monk showed us the rock imprints of Vairochana's foot, ear and nose. In the small temple near the cave, he pointed out a piece of manuscript stored in a glass case. It was amazing to see and

uan, we stopped at a concrete block, marked out with characters in Mandarin; the character for 'Man' looks like person with two legs apart while the one for 'Woman' is a person with legs crossed. An old lady lives in the concrete house next to it, cleaning and collecting 1 Yuan per visit. It was worth much more as it was the cleanest toilet we had come across, no stench and with water running through. Go 'spend a penny' next time you are there. ©

Artists in the Dzogchen Community

Sheryl Jaffe

Artist, Art Teacher and Master Paper Maker
Ludlow, MA

I was in awe of the totem poles and Japanese masks that I saw at the Brooklyn Museum when I was young. We would go ice-skating at Prospect Park and then walk around the museum. Those works spoke to me, they had power. Then I had a chance to take a clay class at the museum, and I got hooked on the tactile quality of the clay, the many different stages of the clay, and I could make something useful. A cup or a vessel that could be filled and emptied, it could be held and touched, cups and bowls could be offered and accepted. They connected me to others.

Many years later I was introduced to making paper from plant material by Elaine Koretsky, renown paper historian and world traveler. The tactile process of trans-



Sheryl makes paper and teaches papermaking on Lower Khandroling.

erations, centuries, across languages, and how the fibers of these connections were

duced me to Naomi Zeitz and Jacqueline Gens. These two amazing women visited my studio and introduced me to the teachings of Rinpoche, which has strengthened my understanding of how profound these connections can be. Through Yantra Yoga especially I feel the power of these connections, through the breath.

Some of us founded the Khandroling Paper Cooperative (khandrolingpapers.blogspot.com), which represents a group of independent artists dedicated to making handmade papers using recycled sacred texts and plant inclusions from the sacred retreat land of Khandroling founded by the Tibetan Dzogchen Master Chögyal Namkhai Norbu in Buckland, MA. Inspired by his teachings on collaboration, we formed the paper cooperative as a place to flourish personally through artistic expression as well as develop sustainable livelihood possibilities for ourselves and our Community. To learn more about this community, visit the Tsegyalgar East website (<http://tsegyalgar.org/>) and our Community blog (tsegyalgar.blogspot.com).

My work explores ephemeral natures: sunlight on water, the sound of a breeze in the leaves, the transformational power of hope and humanity. In my exhibition enti-

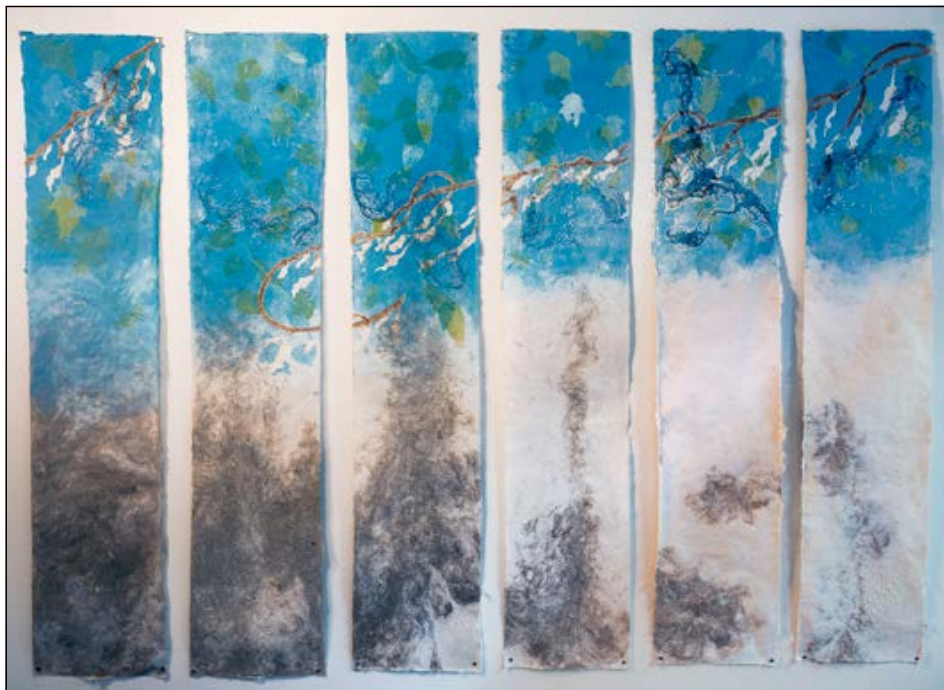


What Do You See Little Frog.

forming cellulose fiber into sheets of paper that could then become sculptures, prints, books, clothing, rattles, really touched me. After traveling to Japan, I understood that paper could become anything, shelter, doors, balloons, and scrolls. Drawings and writings, ideas, thoughts and images from the 9th century can be here with us in the present, because of paper as their vehicle. I became fascinated by paper's role in connecting people, across oceans, across gen-

similar to the way paper is made. It is the way in which the cellulose fibers connect and become intertwined with each other that gives paper its strength, in fact is what makes paper, paper.

I offered a day of papermaking in 2013 as part of my exhibit "Corn and the Connecticut River"; participants made floating molds of five-foot long sheets, and Tatiana Shannon was one of my students. She and I made a connection and she intro-



Ma Ze Kaze.

tled; "Basho's Pond, Lotus leaves, frogs and the spirit of transformation".

*Furu ike ya
kawazu tobikomu
mizu no oto* **Old Pond
Frog Jumps In
Sound of Water
(kerplunk/splash)**

This famous Haiku, written by Japanese Zen poet, Matsuo Basho (1644–1694) was the inspiration for this installation. Out of the timeless serene summer twilight of the old pond comes the "kerplunk" of the frog's splash. As the Buddha changed with noticing the morning star, we can be transformed by the "kerplunk" of the frog. The lotus is known for its purity and beauty that is born from the mud and muck of the world, frogs are living reminders of rain, fertility, transformation and rebirth. Their well-being is closely linked to that of our environment. They are considered an indicator species, indicating various aspects of climate change. Amphibian means two lives, (one on land and one on water); most of us have at least two, some of us many more. Our brains carry the memories from one part of our life to the other and it can be challenging to move through these many lives. Frogs are a great metaphor for these transformations; eggs to polliwogs to froglet to adult frog.

Frogs are considered common creatures; paper is a common material, readily available, taken for granted, "not special". What if we transform our ideas of these creatures and this material and see them



Printing Little Frog.

as fantastic, as adaptable, as extraordinary and as beautiful as they really are.

Transformation is the thread that connects and repels. As living beings we change, grow and are transformed by events, relationships, emotions, experiences. Change is constant this is both difficult and refreshing. In my studio practice I engage with plant fibers that are transformed by heat, water, pounding, movement, color and me. My paperworks are all made of plant fibers, they will continue to absorb the moisture in the air, the ambient light and the mood of the viewer.

My life is continuously being transformed; by meetings of minds, sharing



Floating Mind.

closely held beliefs, chance encounters, and relationships with people I previously thought impossible. I believe in the power of transformation, the sick get healed, the addict gets sober, and depression can give way to joy and empathy. Life is filled with such transformations. I welcome you to consider leaves and frogs, fibers and art-work and their power to transform.

My studio practice is fraught with uncertainty; it is usually like a meditation. I must get quiet enough to hear the small inner voice; to see what can happen that will reflect and interpret these interior emotions and experiences. Sometimes they are completely abstract and surprise me. ©



Sheryl Jaffe is an artist, papermaker, swimmer and teacher residing in Ludlow MA. Please visit sheryljaffe.com and contact me about all things paper.

Interconnected – Embracing Life in Our Global Society

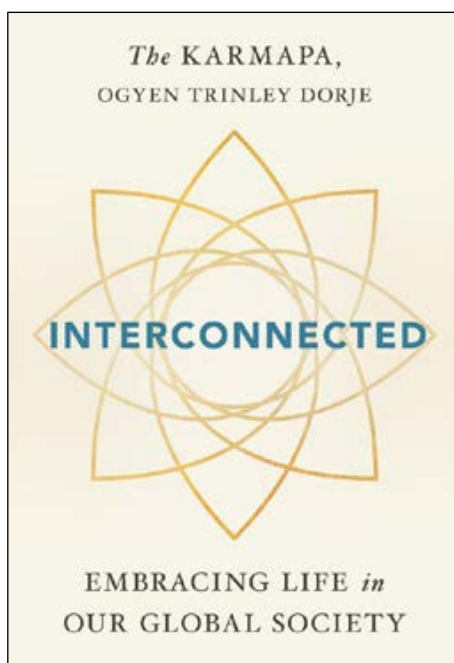
The Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje
Wisdom Publications, 2017
248 pages, ISBN 9781614294122

Alexander Studholme

When the 17th Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje made his bold escape from Tibet at the turn of the millennium, he cannot have envisaged that he would spend the best part of the next seventeen years under a kind of irksome house arrest, cooped up in a borrowed monastery in North India, an innocent victim of the protracted schism that has so riven his Karma Kagyu lineage. At long last, though, he is slowly being given the freedom to travel by the Indian authorities and to fulfill what has always seemed to be his destiny as a world spiritual leader. *Interconnected – Embracing Life in Our Global Society* is His Holiness' framework for a 21st century Buddhist ethic, published in the spring of 2017 to coincide with his visits to the UK, Canada, USA and Germany.

The Karmapa's ethical vision is rooted in the central Buddhist doctrine of interdependence, or dependent arising (*pratityasamutpada* in Sanskrit, or *rtan cing 'brel bar 'byung ba* in Tibetan). Therein, he follows in the footsteps of a number of other modern Buddhist thinkers, most notably the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hahn, who have also promoted this principle as a key to an understanding of our place in the world and, especially, of the environment. "By deepening our awareness of interconnectedness," the Karmapa writes, "we can create a far more harmonious and healthy society and live far more satisfying lives." This is not a political manifesto. He does, for instance, quietly question the direction in which globalization and consumerism are taking us, allude to contemporary events such as the disastrous collapse of a Bangladeshi clothes factory and identify strongly as a vegetarian. But, he is principally concerned here to inculcate a new moral orientation that may, subsequently, be applied to specific situations and issues.

Broadly speaking, he sets out his stall in three different stages: the intellectual,



the emotional and the practical. To begin with, this interconnection is to be understood through analysis; next, it is to be felt, by developing empathy; and, finally, it is to be acted upon, using the energy of compassion. This is undoubtedly a Buddhist book: the section on the person as an interconnected individual is reminiscent of traditional Buddhist teachings on non-self or emptiness, for example, and the practice of generating gratitude as a means of developing the right interconnected attitude springs directly from the culture of Buddhist mind training. But, there is actually very little jargon or specialist terminology to alienate a non-Buddhist, here. Interdependence, after all, is already firmly part of mainstream political discourse. The Karmapa's prescriptions need not oppose or replace, but might rather invigorate an entirely secular approach to this theme.

When I saw the Karmapa at his public teachings in London, I was impressed by two things. The first was how keen he was to reach the people of his own generation – he was born in 1985 – who will grow up with him and join him in what appears to be a very sincere and urgent quest to help change the world for the better. This book clearly has that audience very much in mind, being the result of a series of seminars conducted by the Karmapa with a small group of American university students. Those students, of course, belong to the first generation that has never known the world without the internet. While not blind to the many benefits of technology, it is noticeable that the Karmapa goes to

some lengths to express his misgivings about millennials' particular tendency to spend more and more of their time online.

He criticises the unsatisfactory nature of the connectedness of social media. "I am sceptical that virtual communities can fulfil the function of a real community," he writes. The version of ourselves we present to others online, he suggests, can too easily be somewhat fake: an "artificial persona", a "virtual self." "We are carried so far away by the allure of these illusory connections," he writes, "that we end up trapped within our own private world of electronic illusions." He adds, "In an era of connectivity, it might be wise to make a practice of consciously turning off the screens, so we can allow closeness to blossom slowly and directly."

The second aspect of the Karmapa that most surprised me in London was how very personal he is. This is not just to say that he has his own distinctive voice, though that is certainly true. His book is permeated by the sense of a deeply enquiring and perceptive mind, a fresh eye on the world, capable of many original insights and memorable turns of phrase. He alludes strikingly, for instance, to the "irony of compassion", meaning: "When your awareness of others' suffering remains mere knowledge without full affective involvement, it can cause you pain and distress. Once you connect completely on the level of feelings, that distress goes away." He achieves a poetic quality in his image of how others, in the manner in which they receive the resources we offer them, "can serve as the mirror in which we see our own beauty... something that cannot come to light when we are caught up in an ego-centred life."

By "personal", though, I am really referring to the way in which the Karmapa is so open and honest about his own experience. His predecessor the 16th Karmapa, who said comparatively little and taught largely through his extraordinary noumenal presence, appeared almost to have transcended ordinary personality. The 17th Karmapa, by contrast, is often deliberately and disarmingly human. He is fond of recalling his simple upbringing in a nomad community ("a pastoral way of life – basically a pre-modern lifestyle"), which is evidently the inspiration for his love of the natural world and his instincts about genuine emotional connectedness.

More poignantly, though, he is unafraid to demonstrate his own vulnerability. He speaks frankly about the difficulties of being taken from his family to begin life as a

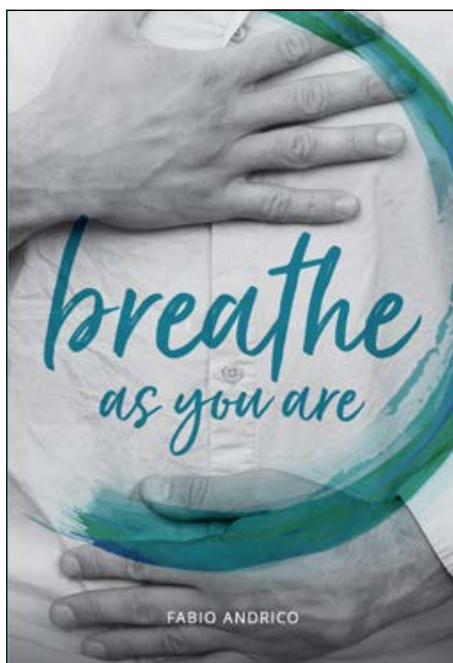
Breathe as You Are

Sergio Quaranta

Just released by Shang Shung Publications, *Breathe As You Are: Harmonious Breathing for Everyone* represents the culmination of Fabio Andrico's decades of experience as a practitioner and teacher of Yantra Yoga and pranayama. His encounters with thousands of people from all walks of life, yoga practitioners and not, made him aware of how many of us are looking for a more profound and experiential understanding of our breathing. And in fact, his research repeatedly confirmed that breathing well is a powerful tool for promoting a healthier life and a more relaxed state.

Harmonious Breathing is a method of teaching and learning that draws on Fabio's direct experience and research, and his book provides a comprehensive overview of all aspects of the method.

Breathe As You Are guides us through a series of exercises, some of which are amazingly simple, that enable us to understand how the breathing process works and how through our breathing we can effect deep changes on the physical, energetic, and mental level. Fabio's clear descriptions of the theory and practice of the respiratory process are illustrated with hundreds of images as well as nicely drawn diagrams. The exercises can be applied by



anyone, regardless of flexibility, and when necessary alternate postures are offered to accommodate each person's unique physical makeup. Most Harmonious Breathing exercises can be practiced with and without supports, using props of various types and even with the help of a simple chair. So anyone can have a go, experiment, understand, and relax while practicing.

Not everyone is able or wishes to practice yoga, but even for those who actually do, this book is a precious practical aid in becoming acquainted with and refining the knowledge of our breath.

Breathe As You Are comes as a conclusion to an interesting phase in the amazing adventure of Harmonious Breathing, and yet it is also the starting point of another, even more exciting one. With the help of the instructors that Fabio has trained over the years, practitioners and non-practitioners alike have been able to learn, apply, and enjoy the many benefits of breathing well through classes and online lessons. This book opens Harmonious Breathing to an even wider audience, and it also serves as a comprehensive guide for those who have already come into contact with the method.

As such, it is a valuable contribution to helping people everywhere actively take charge of their breathing and directly improve their experience of everyday life. ©

reincarnated lama ("I felt really strange at times."), calls himself "His Loneliness" ("Who wants to be friends with someone who is considered to be not entirely human?") and shares the hurt of being taken advantage of ("There have been people I trusted who did not fully live up to the trust placed in them..."). In London, in answer to a question, he confessed that he had tried and failed to keep an aviary, as the 16th Karmapa famously did, as he never felt comfortable with seeing the birds confined in cages, stating baldly: "Because I have always been caged."

What is the Karmapa telling us, in all of the above? That he is his own man, for sure, and not a pale imitation of his predecessor. His remarks have something in common with those of a few other young lamas who, in recent years, have chosen to

let in the light on the downside of the tulku system, though unlike some, the Karmapa seems utterly resolute in living up to the responsibilities of his role – the responsibilities, as he points out, which he left Tibet for as a teenager. Indeed, there can be seen a passionate confidence and conviction in his own worth reflected in his frustration with the obstacles put upon his freedom of movement. "As a result, I have had to greatly reduce my expectation of what I will be able to accomplish," he writes, "... I am living this life primarily cherishing and supporting others, trying to serve as a sort of refuge where others can be assured of finding love."

His candid self disclosure is also consistent with an atmosphere of radical truthfulness that surrounds the Karmapa, a determination to cut through all the protocol and hoopla of his position, to deal with the world as it is and not hide behind the façade of an inscrutable spiritual monarch. In the context of his ethical message, finally, it is part and parcel of the model he himself presents to others of the humility and authenticity of self that he sees as essential to true participation in the web of interconnection, in which he is as involved as anyone else. "Even if I do not have the ideal external conditions to work toward my aims, I am sustained by the awareness that others are dependent on me and have placed their hopes in me," he says, "For me, the basic fact of my interdependence is a source of courage and determination." ©

The Application of Presence

Elio Guarisco

As we know, nowadays in the west in many fields of knowledge the principle of presence popularized by the term 'Mindfulness' has become widespread. But not many people know that Mindfulness in the various ways it is taught in the West relates to the aspects of 'presence' and 'awareness,' singled out for their importance from the main meditation method of original Buddhism called *Satipatthana*, or Application of Presence. This method, which actually includes all the spiritual path of original Buddhism, was expounded by the Buddha in a short discourse called *The Discourse of the Close Application of Mindfulness*, and it is also considered a direct path to enlightenment.

One of the very best books that ever appeared on this subject is by Ven. Anamoli Satipatthana: *The Direct Path to Realization*, published by Windhorse Publications, Birmingham. 2003, reprinted 2004 and 2006 with minor corrections.

Whoever wants to understand the original source of the modern techniques and systems of Mindfulness, and the meaning of mindfulness in its original source, should definitely read this book. It will greatly increase one's understanding of the meaning and applications of presence and awareness; it will also contribute to the deepening one's of knowledge of one's own system of practice; and will lower one's pride and arrogance of practicing a higher system.

Here instead of making the usual presentation of a book, I extracted a few points, mainly highlighting the meaning and the relevance of presence and awareness.

The Four Applications of Mindfulness as a Source of Knowledge

In ancient India the acquisition of knowledge was influenced by three main approaches: ancient sayings transmitted through an oral tradition, logical reasoning, and direct experience found in intuitive knowledge and extrasensory perceptions of ascetics who practiced meditation. Original Buddhism actually places itself in the last of these categories. Yet it does not refute oral tradition and logical reasoning as supportive factors in acquiring knowledge, but it is well aware of their limitations.



Even though one's direct experience may be true, it often reveals only one side of the picture, yet it is considered the only truth, and whoever holds another truth to be on the wrong side. Thus what we experience is not to be considered as an absolute basis of knowledge.

However in Buddhism direct experience represents the central source of knowledge. In particular it is the practice that leads an undistorted understanding of things as they are, independently from scriptures and reasoning. In this framework, oral tradition and reasoning, in the sense of a certain degree of knowledge of the theoretical bases of the practice and reflection, are conditions that contribute to a direct experience of reality through the application of presence.

Satipatthana – Application of Presence

The term *Satipatthana* is the union of '*sati*', a Pali term meaning presence, and '*upatthana*', literally "placing near", "to be present", "to attend to the current situation". Altogether *satipatthana* means "close application of presence".

Sampajana – Awareness

The other aspect that is always mentioned with 'presence' is *sampajana*. This term, which is rendered here as awareness, often appears as "clearly knowing" in English translations of the *Satipatthana* Discourse. It refers to the capacity to comprehend what is happening within and outside. This can lead to knowledge or wisdom but by itself does not imply knowledge or wisdom. For example, when you are killing someone you may be well aware of what you are doing, but there is no wisdom in killing.

In the context of the application of presence, that which the practitioner is aware of is, for example, the breathing, whether it is long or short; if there distractions or not; the physical position; the intention for doing an action and so forth. With the application of presence to the body, sensations, mental states, and patterns of experience, awareness evolves to include discerning wisdom.

Thus the meaning of awareness goes from the basic forms of being conscious of something, such as "I am sitting on a chair", to deep comprehensions. In the practice of the application of presence these two are united, that is, attentive presence goes hand in hand with the processing of the input of information. So in a way awareness is a factor that leads to knowledge.

Presence as Memory

Sati, the Pali term for presence, has the connotation of memory or recollection, and is often found in that sense in the Buddhist scriptures. But in reality *sati* or presence is not actually memory, but that which facilitates and makes memory possible. That is, if there is presence, memory will be clearer.

Sati, or presence in the context of the application of presence, does not have the function of remembering past events, in fact it works as conscience of the present moment. It is presence that reminds us of the present moment that otherwise would be largely missed.

Here presence implies mind presence, as it is directly opposite to absent mindedness. It means to be perfectly awake in relation to the present moment. It is because of this presence, that everything one does or says is clearly apprehended by the mind, and thus can be more easily remembered after.

So presence is not only to be in the present moment, but also to bring that moment to the mind later. Thus *sati* as "to remember" or "to recollect" is just a particular instance of presence. Furthermore *sati* is also the ability to maintain the different aspects of the present moment in the mind.

Examples and the Role of Presence

The cowherd

A classic example of presence is that of a cowherd who, until the fields have been harvested, needs to take care of his cows so that they don't enter the fields. But once the crops are harvested, he can relax and sit under a tree observing his cows from a certain distance. A relaxed and distant observation is the typical disposition of presence.

In strengthening the power of his/her presence, a trainee does not intervene actively in all that happens, for example, in the mind. If an emotion arises, presence has simply the task of recognizing that that emotion is present. A more active intervention is not in the field of the function of presence, but rather that of effort.

Presence as a calm observer of the situation without reacting immediately gives us the possibility, if necessary, to undertake appropriate action. Even though presence provides the clarity that discerns what the best course of action is, it remains somewhat distant with a quality of non-involvement. Presence can interact with more active mind factors, but it does not interfere.

A non-involved receptivity is one of the crucial characteristics of presence. Thus the function of presence is to be conscious of things, not of eliminating them, or reacting to them. Presence observes like a spectator, that is, without interfering. Some people call this "choice-less presence", in the sense that it remains conscious impartially, without reacting "I like", "I dislike".

This silent observation can be sufficient to de-condition oneself from an emotion that is taking grip on the mind. Thus presence can have very active consequences. However presence does not change the experience. It makes it more vivid, it frames it.

Being on the Top of a Tower

The non-interfering quality of presence allows the individual to observe the arising of reactions and to understand the underlying motivations. As soon as one becomes involved in a reaction, the privileged detached observation point of presence is lost.

So the detached receptivity of presence enables one to take a step back from the situation and become an observer without bias of one's subjective involvement and of the entire situation. This distance gives one the possibility to have a more objective perspective, as if one was on the top of a

tower, able to see clearly what is happening in the road below.

Thus receptive detached presence is a middle zone, in the sense that it avoids the two extremes of suppression and reaction. In the absence of suppression and reaction, the receptivity of presence clearly reveals to one's eye one's personal limitations, and unjustified reactions, without that these are suppressed by emotional investments inherent in the image we have of ourselves.

To keep presence in this way is closely related to the ability to tolerate a high degree of cognitive dissonance, because usually to see one's defects leads to unconscious attempts to reduce the sensation of despair, avoiding or altering the perceived information.

Attention and Presence

As a mental quality, presence is closely connected to attention, which is a basic function present in each mental state. This faculty of basic ordinary attention characterizes the fraction of a second between the naked recognition of something that takes place before the conceptual identification of the thing.

So presence can be understood as the development or a temporal extension of this type of attention, that adds clarity and depth to that fraction of second which is too short and which is occupied by naked attention in the cognitive processes.

The aspect of naked attention of presence has an intriguing potential in that it is able to lead to the natural dismantlement of automatic mental mechanisms. Through naked attention presence is able to see things as they are, not adulterated by habitual projections and reactions.

By bringing the cognitive processes in the full light of awareness, one becomes conscious of automatic and habitual responses to cognitive data. This full presence and awareness of the automatic responses to cognitive data is the step necessary to go beyond destructive habits.

Presence is particularly relevant during the reception of sense input. Through the simple presence of a naked and continuous attention, the mind does not amplify or proliferate the information received in various ways.

Non Grasping

It is said that, "The application of presence to the body, feelings, mental states, and patterns of experience (the traditional areas in which the focuses of presence are subsumed) are trained in solely for the sake of knowledge and continuous presence."

This advice indicates the necessity of observing objectively without losing oneself in associations and reactions. In particular it indicates the freedom from identifications that enables one to observe every aspect of one's subjective experience as a simple event, and to remain free of any image of oneself and the grasping of that.

Even though with the application of presence one can make use of mental notes that are names and concepts, this is kept to the minimum. In fact, presence is clearly something very different from intellectual reflection.

One who is always cogitating, cannot be considered a practitioner of presence. Although presence involves training, at a certain point, presence distances itself from goal-oriented practice, and it is applied for its own sake. At that point the goal one has in mind and the act of being present merge into one, and presence becomes spontaneous and without effort. ©

How I Met Chögyal Namkhai Norbu

Curzio Aloisi

Hil My Name is Curzio Aloisi and this is how I met Rinpoche.

It is a simple story, nothing miraculous – a story of friendship and connection.

It all started when I was seven. This kid Jampel Del'Angelo came to our English school in Rome, it was September 1989...At the time I already had a best friend, Paco. He had made me the manager of the lunch-break football team, I was very honored with that title and I took pride in it. Little did I know that it was only to not make me play at all, and yes, I probably wasn't all that good at playing football.

So this kid Jampel quickly ascends to popularity: he is smart, he is athletic, he is in synch with fashion, and the ladies love him. Taking over the football field, he quickly fired me from the position of manager, or rather, he burst my bubble. It definitely was painful, like an ice-cold bucket of water. Either way, we became friends. It was from him that I learned how to wear back washed blue jeans, how to play the Sega Game Gear color portable videogame, and how to have fun! I was a somewhat troubled kid and he was always there for me, a good friend.

We would do sleepovers and that's where I met all his family, Giacomella, Andrea, and Matteo. We would play in his garden and dare each other to climb trees, do pushups, fight, play video games, going to the park; it was fantastic. Running around their house I certainly noticed many oriental paintings on cloth, and in particular one of a naked lady playing drums, it was hung on a column right at the entrance. Matteo had a beautiful drawing of Tibet in his bedroom, or it might have been Jampel's room, certain things I cannot remember anymore. I do remember they were good times. One summer vacation, my dad brought me up to Monte Amiata in Tuscany so I could spend some time with my friend and his family. They had just bought a very nice house in the country and it was still being renovated; we were sleeping in a rented apartment in Roccalbegna, it was great fun running around the farm, they also had horses. There I met



Jampel's uncle Enrico, and Jampel's grandfather. One day we drove up to Merigar.

At the time Rinpoche wasn't there, but we had lunch there, we ate at the Yellow house, it was pasta shells in a curry sauce, it was one of the first times I tasted curry, I remember that clearly. I was playing up there with my fishing rod and pretending the dirt road was a river. The rod was a gift for my birthday by my Dad, who has a passion for fishing. I rarely fish anymore, but when I do, I try to integrate and enjoy.

After that summer, my friend and I lost touch, going to different middle and high schools.

Then something awakened in me. Towards the end of high school I started to take interest in meditation. When we were on a family trip to New York I went and bought a book on 'Tibetan Mysticism' by Lama Anagorika Govinda at the famous Barnes and Nobles in Union Square. Back from holidays, I decided to find some center to do some meditation. At that time I was living in a small village near Cambridge in UK. I started participate in the community of master Sri Chinmoy. It was good and powerful, but very difficult for me to follow all the ashram like rules. I was pretty distraught when I dropped out, but I knew I wanted to do some 'Buddhist' practice.

At that point I was back in Rome, right on time for Jampel's 18th birthday party, to which I decided to go, so I could see my long lost friend. It was nice to see Jampel again and to catch up! Giacomella and Andrea were happy to see me again too. Talking with them they discovered my interest in meditation, and Giacomella said that I should read *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* by Sogyal Rinpoche. So the following weeks I did that. I was reading for the first time about Dzogchen and it was very interesting.

Jampel and I started to hang out more, and one night when I was having dinner at Jampel's house in Rome, Giacomella had made an excellent lasagne, as always, she mentioned that there was a great Dzogchen master in Tuscany near their house and that I should go to the summer retreat.

So I did. I was back in Merigar after many years, and was excited to receive direct introduction!

It was around 2002 and it was a Longde retreat, and Rinpoche was great! I met a lot of new people, but a great coincidence was that my second grade teacher from when I was seven years old was there!

I didn't really understand or experience much though. I went to the following summer retreat, and this time when it was over I had a clear experience of my state, while riding back home on my moped. I am extremely grateful to have had the fortune of meeting Rinpoche, the teaching, and the Community. And it was all because of friendship and connection. ©



Russian Dancers photo by Lesya Cherenkova.



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