



# THE MIRROR

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Training the Five Capacities  
What Is Dzogchen?

Interview with Menpa Phuntsog Wangmo  
about Covid-19

Focus on Merigar West



INTERNATIONAL  
DZOGCHEN  
COMMUNITY

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Front and back covers: Thousands of fish were blessed and released into Bagnas tal lake in Nepal on the full moon day. See the article on page 15. Photos by Mandarava Bricaire



Chögyal Namkhai Norbu working at Dzamling Gar.



# Our Dzogchen Community

Fabio Maria Risolo

Director of Merigar West and SMS instructor

**T**he Dzogchen Community has existed for 50 years.

Time measures the passing of the years and with them records the events that take place and the initiatives that have been undertaken. From this point of view it is always surprising and extraordinary to recall the quantity and unique quality of the works created by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu in the most varied fields of application. The article in this issue of *The Mirror*, on Merigar's 40 years is an evident, albeit still only indicative, testimony. Each Gar in the Dzogchen Community, each Ling, each of us could add to it other elements and contributions in this direction.

But the Dzogchen Teaching, transmitted by the Master, first in the West, over half a century, to thousands of people, cannot actually be measured within a limited time span, however long it may be.

Living knowledge and the transmission of Dzogchen, our own primordial state, cannot be defined or confined by the logical categories of rational thought. It is simply beyond space and time. The recognition of our true nature brings with it this understanding which takes place in the essential experience of our presence.

However, there can be no doubt about this – our Dzogchen Community lives in time and at the same time it develops and testifies to what is not measurable over time. In this sense, the three years that have passed since the end of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's material life on this earth do not mark any interruption or end.

The Teaching, the Transmission and the Master are alive.

The Sangha is the Teaching, the Transmission and the Master, because they live and are recognized in ourselves and in our being together. We all know it and we live it. The life of the Sangha is nourished by our presence and awareness. The evidence of its reality lies in our ability to listen and to generate unity and harmony within it.

All this is very concrete and is the mirror in which we can see and recognize ourselves, without projecting all our thoughts and emotions outside.

Greetings to all!

©



## Dzamling Gar, Tenerife, Spain

In February 2016, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu spoke about the importance of the Global Gar for the future of the teaching and the Community.

“Dzamling Gar is not only the Gönpa – there are many things to do, to construct and develop here... Dzamling Gar is in the interest of the whole Dzogchen Community, not only Namkhai Norbu. This is very important for everybody to understand.

... We need to continue the teaching. Even though in 100 years none of us will be living here, the Dzogchen Community and teaching must continue. For that reason we are trying to do our best and I am always working and interested particularly in the Gonpa because it is very important.”



Rinpoche greeting the young people of Merigar after a teaching session in 2005. Photo by Romain Piro

born... After that, new Gars and Lings have arisen, all over the world, but everything started here.”

## Merigar West, Italy

In July 2011, during a picnic at Gadeling, the Master's residence at Merigar West, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu explained the unique characteristic of the Gar to those present.

“Merigar is the source of all the Gars of the Community, all over the world. Merigar is the first [Gar], where the Community was born... After that, new Gars and Lings have arisen, all over the world, but everything started here.”





## Merigar East, Romania

The day before the 2008 summer retreat, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu came to the Gar – at that time an enormous white tent surrounded by strings of colored prayer flags flapping in the breeze, in a large bare flat field stretching as far as the eye could see – and spoke to a group of his students who were gathered there.

“Look around, you see, there’s more sky than earth. It’s like a big sky mandala. It is rare to find such a perfect sky mandala.”

## Kunsangar South, Crimea

It was during the Crimea retreat in 2013 when Rinpoche said:

“Kunsangar South is a place for practice, not farming. It’s also an important place for future generations.”



## Kunsangar North, Russia

In 2004 on Margarita Island, Venezuela, Rinpoche invited Russian people to gather for a conversation, where he said:

“Kunsangar is the main place, Gar, for not only the Russian Dzogchen Community but also for all Russian language speakers. I give much importance to Kunsangar, putting a lot of effort and trying to go there every year. The number of people in the Russian community is one of the highest. That’s why we should care about it.”





## Samtengar, China

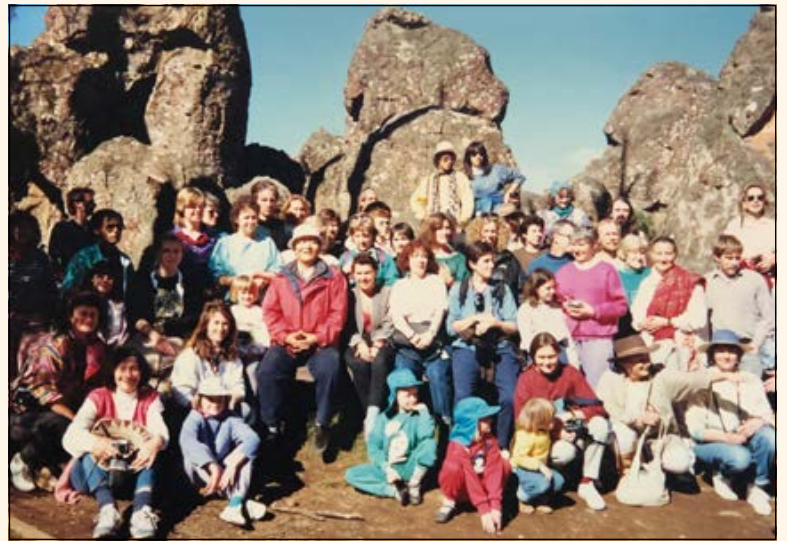
In December 2016, during a visit to the Samtengar house at Dzamling Gar in Tenerife, Canary Islands, Rinpoche spoke about a dream he had had. When talking about the development of the Dzogchen teachings in China, Rinpoche said:

“I am very confident about that, because the first time I was in Singapore I had a dream, ... [near the end of the dream] I was in Tiananmen [Square], there were millions of people who seemed to be on holiday and everybody was singing the Song of the Vajra continuously ... After that I thought that China would really develop knowledge of the Dzogchen teachings.”

## Namgyalgar, Australia

November 8, 2015 - Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's last words at the end of the Teaching retreat on Dorje Sempa Namkha Che.

“This is in Australia where we have the Dzogchen Community. People that are interested in the Dzogchen Teachings should remember that there is a place and practitioners and try to collaborate and develop. So you should remember that because teaching is very useful, not just for practitioners but for all sentient beings, human beings particularly. Dzogchen Teaching is to make [us] understand going beyond limitations, getting into knowledge and enjoying life. This is useful for everybody.”



At Hanging Rock after climbing up, 1992.

Courtesy of Jan Cornall



## Tsegyalgar East, USA

“Six days on Khandroling equals six months of Practice.”

When Khandroling was purchased Rinpoche said:

“We are not buying land to grow potatoes but to make rainbow bodies.”

Walking to the first Sang practice on Khandroling.  
(photo courtesy of John Foster)



## Tsegyalgar West, Mexico

“One part of the land we keep for the rushan practices and on the other part we will build personal longer retreat cabins and the Gakyil of Tsegyalgar West will organize all necessary services for the retreat people. At the main place, we will try to build a Gonpa or meeting hall, a Community office and services. We should project all these things related with the global Dzogchen Community needs, not only for a few people who are living around here.”



In 2002 on the wall of Gönpa, then under construction, the Master wrote The Three Statements of Garab Dorje. Photo by N Zeitz

## Tashigar North, Venezuela

“I want to tell something to everyone I connected with the webcast. We are here in Margarita. And you all know we had some problems in Margarita. That’s why I am not living here as I was before, only coming for a short time while we are doing a retreat. But many people think I have almost renounced Tashigar Norte. That is wrong, *I will never renounce Tashigar Norte. In Tashigar Norte I gave so many important Dzogchen Teachings, this is a sacred place, we empower it, we prepare it – forever we will continue here – so you must not think that.*”

November 9th, 2010, Margarita Island, Venezuela

## Tashigar South, Argentina

The final words of Rinpoche from his visit to Tashigar South in 1998 after the construction of the first house by Ricky Sued in Tashigar Mandala:

“We want to enjoy the end of our life, then the rest of life we can enjoy together, doing practice and having a nice life, instead of a sad one. If I have a chance I will enjoy with you. This is my aim.”



Rinpoche working on the dark cabin with the Community.



# Training the Five Capacities

An excerpt from the morning session of day 4, December 31, 2017, of the Atiyoga Teaching Retreat given by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu at Dzamling Gar, Tenerife.

Transcription by Anna Rose  
 Edited by Naomi Zeitz  
 Tibetan with the kind assistance of Adriano Clemente

**G**ood day for everybody and everywhere. We start with our practice of Ati Guruyoga.

What are the principles of the more inner Teachings that I explained yesterday? This is something related particularly with the Three Statements of Garab Dorje. First of all, there is direct introduction. This is the base in Dzogchen Teaching. For example, if you are growing something in a field, it is not sufficient that you only work there, but first of all you need to plant a seed and then something can grow. If there is no seed nothing will grow. Even if something grows it is not necessarily what we need. In the same way, the first thing in the Dzogchen Teaching we should do is discover our real nature. At least we can receive that in a more general way with Ati Guruyoga when we relax.

I have told you that when we are relaxing – this is all contained in the series of Dzogchen Teaching Dzogchen Semde. Later when we are discovering our real nature, maybe we are not 100% sure of our experience. It is not sufficient that you go to the Teacher and say, “Oh, Teacher, tell me what to do so I do not remain in doubt.” Even if the Teacher wants to give you that, he/she cannot. Only you can discover that somehow. In this case, there is a series of Teachings called Longde that were collected by Manjushrimitra and combined with the second statement of Guru Garab Dorje.

When you have discovered your real nature and you are 100% sure, then you can do the practice of Dzogchen. What is the practice of Dzogchen? Dzogchen is not chanting mantras or doing visualizations of mandalas and deities, etc. These things are relative. The principle is that we are trying to be in the state of contemplation as much as possible, and particularly when we have that knowledge we are integrating the aspects of our body, speech, mind, everything, in that state. To practice Dzogchen means that. So, it is not related with where we are living, which way we are sitting, which way we are chanting, or which way we are doing visualization; these are all mental concepts. So, we need to discover in which way we can develop and integrate from the beginning. I told you that the most important thing in order to be in the state of contemplation is to be present. Being present becomes more and



Photo by Vartan Mkhitarian

more familiar to us and then there is more possibility to integrate. Integration in the Dzogchen Teaching is a very, very important practice. For example, if we want to arrive at a high level of inner practice to realize the Great Transference, for example, we should understand that the base is integration. If we do not know that, then there is no way to attain the rainbow body.

## Four Visions

Some people think, “Oh, when we are dying somehow we become the rainbow body.” It is not that you become the rainbow body, but that you develop the state of the fourth level of the visions. In this case, when we are learning an inner teaching we can learn the four visions in a very precise way. So, that person is prepared and really ready to follow the inner Teachings and is very interested in that. Then you decide, “Oh, I want to follow the inner practices of the Dzogchen Teaching.” You ask the Teacher and the Teacher understands that is the base of total realization. Of course, then the Teacher knows how your condition is and the Teaching goes ahead in that way.

In this case I explained this principle in Santi Maha Sangha. Santi Maha Sangha is very important for the inner understanding of the Dzogchen Teaching. First of all Santi Maha Sangha explains all the Teachings in a more general way, like the aspect of the Sutra, Tantra and then Dzogchen. But it doesn't mean that we need to learn everything slowly and then we are developing. This is all information and a way to understand what are the arguments and the principles. Practitioners need to have a kind of background.

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When we start to study Sutra, for example, the principle teachings and applications are *tawa*, *gompa*, *chöpa*, etc.

### Five Capacities

The characteristic of Sutra is that it is called the path of the renunciation. In Santi Maha Sangha there are all these explanations at the beginning the base of the Santi Maha Sangha. Then Vajrayana is slowly developing. It means that a person who has a little capacity higher than in an ordinary way, they can apply and can learn in that way. But you must understand capacity.

It is not correct to observe which kind of capacity you have or think you do not have sufficient capacity for applying Vajrayana and stop with Sutra. We can and should construct capacity. Sometimes there are explanations of the capacities in Sutra, Vajrayana, Dzogchen, Anuyoga etc., in a slightly different way, but basically what Buddha Shakyamuni explained in Sutra is the *understanding* of our capacity. When you are studying Sutra teaching it says *wangpo nga*, *wangpo nga* which means, *wangpo* means principle, the five principles. In an individual condition the five principles are our five senses. You need to see, you need to hear, etc. Without this kind of relative condition you cannot understand anything. But with the same name and in the same writings, *wangpo nga* also means the five capacities.

### First Capacity – Participation

You must understand then what is being explained. Sometimes it means the five elements, and sometimes it means the five capacities. The first capacity that Buddha explained is participation, faith or devotion. There are different aspects that you can also call by different names, but the conclusion is that when we are following a teaching the most important aspect is participation. If you are not interested and you have no desire to participate you will never receive that teaching and you can never get on this path. So, it is indispensable that the first thing is your participation.

Participation is also considered particularly in Vajrayana and Dzogchen Teaching and this is also a high level of capacity. You see, for example, in this world how many people we have. All human beings have more or less the qualification of being human. But how many people are interested in the path, in realization? Even if people understand there is teaching like Dzogchen, which is very precious, not only precious for having realization but precious also for living in society quietly and comfortably, they are not interested. If you have knowledge of the Dzogchen Teaching you can have that benefit. But not many people are following or participating in that. Therefore participating is a very high level of potentiality. Even if you only have that potentiality of participation and you are missing all the others, you can construct them.

### Second Capacity – Diligence

It is not always necessary to construct, but many people have the qualification of only having some of these capacities. For example, if you think you want to follow a teaching, you have the capacity of wanting to follow the teaching. You have that capacity, but now you need a second capacity. The second capacity Buddha explained

is *tson*, *tsondu*, *tson*, which means diligence. So, if you have no diligence, even if you have participation, nothing will be realized. In our condition some people are very diligent, everything they do they try to work and apply. Some people are lazy and are not doing anything. But if you are present, then you can understand and discover.

### Third Capacity – Presence

In any case, we can construct diligence. So you have participation and diligence, but if you have no presence, you can deconstruct many things and you lose time. It is called *trenpa*, *trenpa* means presence.

### Fourth Capacity – Contemplation

So, you have diligence, participation, you are present; you have these kinds of qualifications and therefore you can realize a little better. Then Buddha explained the fourth capacity. It is called *tingngendzin* or *nyamzhag*, which means the contemplation state. It doesn't mean we have knowledge of contemplation or we are immediately getting in that state. Having the capacity of contemplation means that first of all we know that contemplation is indispensable for total realization. We can follow any kind of teaching, Sutra teaching, Tantric teaching, Dzogchen teaching, etc. Through all these teachings we can have realization sooner or later. Of course, in Sutra teaching we are still very far from real knowledge.

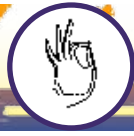
### Accumulation of Merits

I have said that when practitioners do not understand they are concentrated on accumulating merits, good actions, etc., and they think it is very important. Most of the faithful to the Dharma in Tibet are dedicated in that way. For example, if they are doing something for accumulating merits you ask them, "What you are doing?" They say, "We are doing Dharma." Dharma means the path and we are following the path to have realization.

When you go to Nepal, for example, near to Boudhanath, all the Tibetans are very busy going around the stupa. You can ask someone, "What you are doing?", they say, "We are doing Dharma." If you ask, "How is it Dharma when you are going only walking around?" It's very difficult to find someone who can explain. Even some Lamas who are considered to have knowledge of the teaching cannot explain. They only believe in accumulating merits. You remember in the Mahayana teaching it says, "If you have good intention, you can produce good."

Even if you have hundreds, thousands, millions of good intentions, you cannot have total realization only with intention. For having total realization with any kind of practice you do, at the end you should do *tingngendzin*, contemplation. For that reason Buddha explained capacity of contemplation; the state of contemplation is most important for the path to realization. I have given you before an example of how Buddha compared two people: one was accumulating only merits and one was in the state of contemplation. Buddha explained that if someone is in state of contemplation only for a short time, it is much more important than dedicating all your life to accumulating merits. For that reason, we need also knowledge, and most people are ignorant of that.





When we study knowledge a little deeper, the relative condition and in an intellectual way, then we can understand relatively what we are doing by accumulating merits and how we can produce that benefit. There is always a reason with very precise explanations. But we are not doing this; we are only applying with our intentions. For example, when we are going around a Stupa, we make a *khoro* and we are turning around, we are thinking that we are accumulating virtue. How does that happen? If you study Vinaya you can understand.

So, some people ask in which Vinaya book is this explained? There is not any specific explanation of what happens when you go around the stupa. But when you are studying, you are thinking, then you can understand. For example, in the time of Buddha Shakyamuni, Buddha gave Teachings that satisfied all the students, and at the end the students did prostrations for the Buddha. Prostrations are a means of paying respect. That is all. Then they went around Buddha seven times. What does it mean that this action is becoming a good action? Because in all the different countries there are different cultural attitudes. For example, in India's ancient tradition when we put someone on our right side we are paying respect to that person. You can understand that when you study in Vajrayana teaching, the explanation of how students must pay respect to their teachers. There is a book which is called Lama Ngachupa – Lama fifty, fifty arguments. It is the way of paying respect to the teacher with fifty arguments. One of the these arguments, for example, says that when you walk and you are with your teacher, you must not be on the right side of the teacher because you are not paying respect. So, for that reason, we put the stupa on our right side and we turn one time, two times, etc., and in this way we accumulate merits.

When we think of Buddhist and Bönpo in Tibet, Tibetans say, “Bönpos do everything in the contrary way.” Also when we go to Mount Kailash, we go around on the right side. That means we are paying respect and accumulating merits. Some Bönpos go in the contrary way. We always meet on the road. The Bönpos do that because the origin of Bönpo is Shang Shung and the tradition of Shang Shung is paying respect by putting on the left side, not the right side. Still this tradition continues in China; China and Shang Shung are the same. When there is guest, a very important guest, they put them on the left side. When you put the respected guest on the right side, India is the origin.

### Fifth Capacity – Prajna

So, you see, we can understand if we are reading books, we are thinking a little, and then we can understand the reasons. This is not only about turning around the stupa, etc. but everything. So, it is very important we know the capacities. Buddha finally explained the fifth capacity, which is called the capacity of the prajna. Prajna means developing our capacity of clarity. Of course, if we are doing practice etc. then prajna develops. Prajna is necessary because if you are following teaching, sometimes the teacher is explaining using some Sanskrit words and if you are completely new to this teaching you have no idea what that is.

For example when I say *dharmakaya*, *sambhogakaya*, *nirmanakaya*, *kadag*, *lhundrub*, and you may not know what these words mean. Most of my students know because I explained those words for forty years. So, when you see that there are some obstacles and that you need to learn and develop, then you can learn and this construction is called *prajna*. So, these are the Five Capacities as explained by Buddha in the Sutra teaching. We are not always jumping to a very high level or concept. We should understand that everything is very precise in the real sense. ❀



# What Is Dzogchen?

An excerpt from *Starting the Evolution, An Introduction to the Ancient Teaching of Dzogchen* compiled and edited by Alfredo Colitto, Shang Shung Publications, 2018.

When I arrived in Italy for the first time, many years ago, no one knew what Dzogchen was. The only exceptions were a few professors who wrote articles saying things like, "Various currents of Buddhism exist in Tibet, there is also one called 'Dzogchen.'" Nowadays, Dzogchen is becoming more and more popular in the Western world. Still, people who hear or read this name for the first time think, "Oh, this must be one of the Eastern philosophies."

You can consider it a philosophy, a religion, or a spiritual path, if you wish, but it is not like that. It is important to understand that Dzogchen is not really a kind of school or tradition. Dzogchen is our real nature, a potentiality that we all have. It is a very ancient knowledge, transmitted and taught. The way that teaches the methods to discover that potentiality and use it in our lives, is called Dzogchen *teaching*. We can follow it and learn how to discover our real nature. Total (*chen*) Perfection (*dzog*).

It is a very high teaching, but high does not necessarily mean complicated. Dzogchen can be very simple. Why? Because it is based on experience, not so much on study and learning. The teacher explains a little, introduces us to directly discover our real condition, and when we do discover it, then we have that knowledge.

This is something very useful also in a practical way: if we know our real condition, we can overcome all our conflicts or problems. And we also get to know ourselves a little better. So this is what the teaching can give. This is what I have been teaching for more than 40 years.

## Dzogchen and Eastern Culture

Every teaching is transmitted through the culture and knowledge of human beings. But it is important not to confuse any culture or tradition with the teachings themselves, because the essence of the teachings is knowledge of the nature of the individual.

If someone does not know how to understand the true meaning of a teaching through their own culture, they can create confusion. Sometimes, Western people go to India or Nepal to receive initiations and teachings by Tibetan masters living there, maybe in some monasteries. Once there, they are fascinated by the special exotic atmosphere, by the spiritual "vibration." Maybe they stay a few months, and when they go back home they feel different from the people around them. Maybe they dress differently, they eat Ti-



Photo by Ralf Plüschke

betan food, they behave in some peculiar manner, and they think that this is an important part of their spiritual path.

But the truth is that to practice a teaching that comes from Tibet, there is no need to try to become like a Tibetan. On the contrary, it is crucial for practitioners to integrate that teaching into their own culture to keep it alive within themselves.

Often, when Western people approach an Eastern teaching, they believe that their own culture is of no value. This attitude is very mistaken, because every culture has its value, related to the environment and circumstances in which it arose. No culture can be said to be better than another. For this reason it is useless to transport rules and customs into a cultural environment different from the one in which they arose.

## Dzogchen and Religion

Human beings have created different cultures, philosophies, and religions in different times and places. Someone who is interested in the Dzogchen teaching must be aware of this and know how to work with different cultures, without becoming conditioned by their external forms.

For example, some people might think that to practice Dzogchen you have to convert to either Buddhism or Bön, because Dzogchen has been spread through these two religious traditions. This shows how limited our way of thinking is. If we decide to follow a spiritual teaching, we are convinced that it is necessary for us to change something, such as our way of dressing, eating, behaving, and so on. But to practice the Dzogchen teaching there is no need to adhere to any religious doctrine or to enter a monastic order, or to blindly accept the teachings and become a "Dzogchenist." All of these things can, in fact, create serious obstacles to true knowl-

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edge. Monks or nuns, without giving up their vows, can practice Dzogchen, as can a Catholic priest, an office worker, a laborer, and so on, without having to abandon their role in society, because Dzogchen does not change people from the outside. Rather it awakens them internally.

Dzogchen is not a school or sect or a religious system. It is simply a state of knowledge that masters have transmitted beyond any limits of a school or monastic tradition. The lineage of the Dzogchen teaching has included masters belonging to all social classes: farmers, nomads, nobles, monks, and great religious figures, from every spiritual tradition or sect. A person who is really interested in these teachings should understand their fundamental principle without letting themselves become conditioned by the limits of a tradition.

### How to Start on the Path

Students who are interested in discovering their real nature follow a teacher who has that knowledge. In Dzogchen it is indispensable to receive, from a qualified master, what we call direct introduction or direct transmission. We will talk later about what this is.

Dzogchen is related to our physical level, to our energy, and to our mind, because we all have these three existences. So, when we are introduced to that knowledge by somebody who has realized that potentiality, we discover it not as a kind of intellectual understanding but a direct experience. If we discover our real condition and how to remain in it, we can be free from all our problems. But in general we do not know that; we do not even know that there is something to discover.

### Discovering and Believing

Discovering and believing are two different things. For example, you might say, "That person is an expert, I like the way he or she explains, I believe that." Maybe you believe it this year. But next year, you might meet someone even more expert and decide to follow what they say, even if it is different from what you believed the year before. This means that your belief is not really steady. It can change at any moment. But if you discover something through your own experience, then there is nothing to change.

It is not so difficult to understand. How do we know, for example, that sugar and candies are sweet? We do not need any book explaining to us the theory of sweetness. Why? Because we have already discovered it through our experience. Even though we know something intellectually, we are curious and we want to have a concrete experience. If you say to a little child, "Don't go near the fire, otherwise you can get burned," the child does not know what you are talking about. It wants to experience it. So maybe one day, when you are not looking, it goes near the fire, touches something hot and discovers that heat can be painful. Then it never loses that knowledge.

In the Dzogchen teaching we apply the same principle. It is not that the teacher explains something and asks you to believe in his words. Of course, if you believe, it is okay.

Faith and belief can be powerful, we know that. Systems like religions are based on faith. However, the principle of the Dzogchen teaching is not so much believing what the teacher said, but discovering our real nature by ourselves. A teacher can help us to understand, explaining for example that in this relative reality we have three levels of existence, that we also call three gates: body, energy, and mind. We can learn that, but we also need to discover it through our personal experience.

### Direct vs. Intellectual Understanding

When we want to understand something, we ask ourselves, "Why is it like this?" Then we find some justification: "It could be like this for this or that reason." We think of it some more, then we decide, "Yes, this must be it."

This is called intellectual understanding. But in the case of our real condition it does not work, because there is no direct experience. When we have no direct experience we can say, "Yes, our real condition is like that," but tomorrow or next week we can change our idea. If there is something to change, it means that we have only an intellectual understanding.

For example, I show you my sunglasses, and you see that the lenses are black. You have no questions about that, because you have a direct perception of them through your sight. This is an experience. Now, suppose that I ask you, "Please change your mind, these sunglasses are not black, they are yellow." How could you do that? How could you change what you see? It is impossible. This direct knowledge that you received through experience it is not changeable. But if I do not show anything to you and I just say, "Once I had some black sunglasses," then you think, "Oh, he once had black sunglasses." But a little later I say, "Sorry, that is not true, the sunglasses I had were yellow, not black." Then you immediately change your idea. "Okay, he said black but he was wrong, now I know his sunglasses were yellow." Why can you change your mind so easily? Because you had no direct perception of the sunglasses.

So you see, this is the difference when we discover something with our experience or only with our mind. Logic is something very, very relative. ❀

# The Mirror Survey

Dear readers,

In July we conducted an online survey with the main goal of improving and better serving our readership. We were very happy to receive feedback from more than 400 people and warmly thank all of them for their time, participation and valuable advice. Here we briefly present the results of the survey and the steps we are planning based on these results.

In general, the response was very positive. It reveals that we have many readers who visit the website and download the PDF-issue. Our content mostly corresponds to people's interests and expectations. We could make it more visible and accessible with regular newsletters, mobile-friendly technology and up-to-date translations into other languages; diversify it with some new features, adding more videos and complementing in-depth long-reads with more entertaining, easy-to-read material; and make it more interactive with a possibility for practitioners to connect and share information.

If you would like to see the results of the survey in more detail, you can do so here: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/16H29uZmEp3D6jdNFq4\\_JdWfMR0796bBWmMYF6u63-Dg/](https://docs.google.com/document/d/16H29uZmEp3D6jdNFq4_JdWfMR0796bBWmMYF6u63-Dg/)

Based on this feedback, in the near future we plan to offer donation based announcements and publicity to our readers. In addition, we have started to send out a bi-weekly digest to worldwide practitioners by email. We are also happy to inform you that The Mirror is currently expanding its content with video interviews.

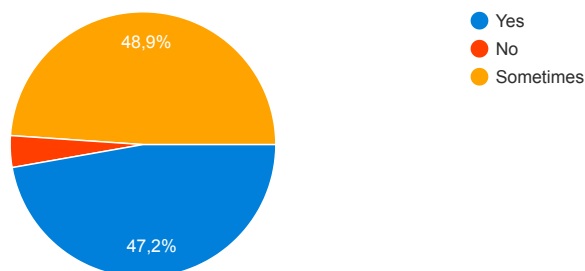
A fundraising message has just been successfully launched online with part of the funds going to modernize and upgrade The Mirror's valuable historical archive, as well as inviting skilled karma yogis interested in collaborating in this important activity.

At the moment we are initiating a search for a software to have a web version of the PDF-issue. We will try to make it more mobile and especially e-book friendly. We also consider to improve versions in other languages to provide a timely and high-quality translation.

With best wishes,  
The Mirror Editorial Team

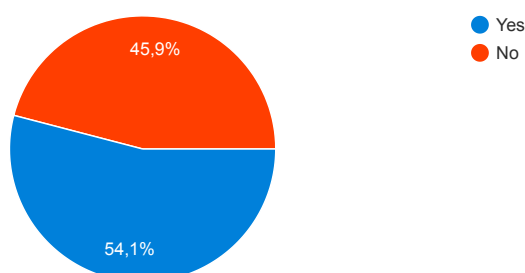
Do you read The Mirror?

415 Replies



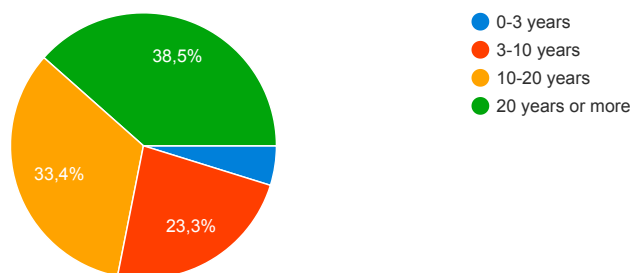
Do you know the PDF and the printed version are available 4 times a year?

418 Replies



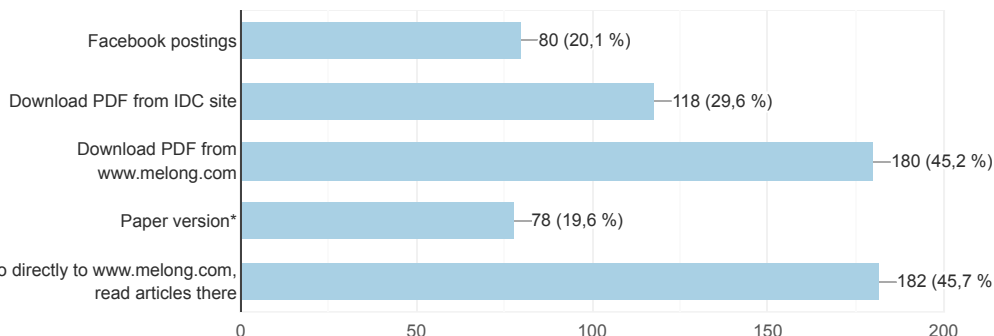
How long have you been involved in the Dzogchen Community?

416 Replies



When you read the Mirror, where do you prefer to do it?

398 Replies







## Welcome to a Series of Dialogues to Promote an Awakened Culture

### Why?

Facing the present situation of our world, the promotion of an awakened culture is vital. It can support the evolution of each individual potential and can make available favorable conditions for improving our global society.

Therefore, we propose to catalyze the emergence of a decentralized cooperative network linking persons motivated to contribute to such an awakened culture, for the good of all.

### Who?

A sequence of online meetings is initiated by the International Atiyoga Foundation and the International Rimay Foundation, but the network will be decentralized welcoming in a circle of elders, operating by consensus, all motivated speakers and actors.

### What?

We plan to invite various experts who will speak on "how to contribute" to an awakened culture. We will propose them to link activities to cooperate in synergies.

### When?

We will start with these dialogues in October 2021 and we will hold them regularly.

### How?

These cultural dialogues will be held via Zoom and live on YouTube channels. They will be simultaneously translated in several languages.

More information will follow soon.

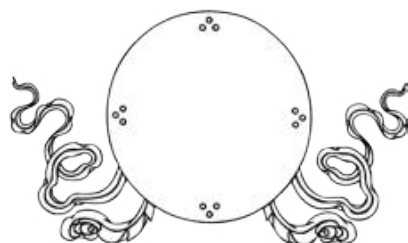
Stay well and keep your being curious and present,  
Oliver Leick  
Moderator



## Thank You!

The editorial staff of The Mirror and the International Gakyil would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to many of our readers for the very welcome donations that they recently made to The Mirror in response to our fundraising appeal.

Your generosity means a lot to us and will help us to continue bringing news and articles about the Dzogchen Community to our readers, both on our website and in our quarterly pdf magazine. In addition we would like you to know that your gesture is more than just financial support – it shows us your interest and support for the work we do and for the International Dzogchen Community and inspires us to go ahead as best we can.



Thanks to your generous support on September 30 we had raised €10,371, with a good €9,135 in response to the fundraising campaign that started on September 21. In just a few days the number of donors went from 36 to 104! This means that we have covered 39% of our expenses for 2021 which include editorial staff, layout, printing, and website maintenance.

Let's join forces so that we can cover at least 70% of our costs (or 100%, if it doesn't seem too ambitious).

Liz, Naomi, Anastasia and Thomas  
The Mirror Editorial Team  
[www.melong.com](http://www.melong.com)  
<http://melong.com/donations/>

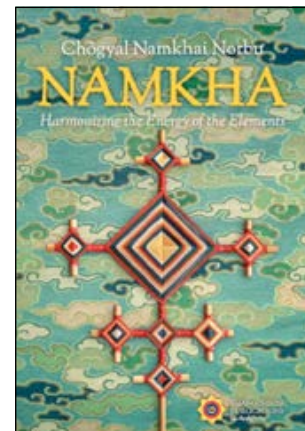
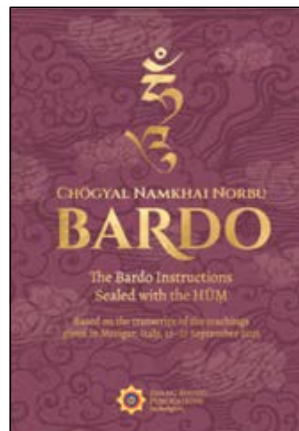
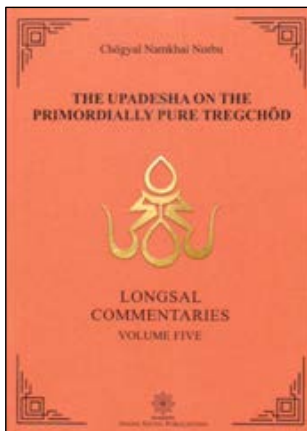




Dearest friends and supporters of the Ka-Ter Translation Project of the Shang Shung Institute Austria,

As you probably all know, recently three wonderful book by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu were published by Shang Shung Publications:

The Upadesha on the Primordially Pure Tregchöd, Longsal Commentaries, Vol. Five; Bardo, The Bardo Instructions Sealed with the HUM; Namkhai, Harmonizing the Energy of the Elements.



These books are again a manifestation of the fruit of the initiative and activity of the Ka-Ter Translation Project.

Due to the wisdom and the capacities of the translators we were able to not only provide an excellent translation, but we also contributed to the printing of these books.

We could do all that just because of your collaboration and your generous support.

Very soon the next book by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu will be published: The Necklace of Jewels.

All information about this book will be published in the next weeks.

You can order all these books from **Shang Shung Publications**

You can find more information about the Ka-ter Translation Project on **our website**.

Please keep on supporting our fruitful work!

Here are the bank details for your donations:

Account holder: Shang Shung Institute Austria

IBAN: AT19 3815 1000 0003 0387

BIC: RZSTAT2G151

Address of the bank:

Hauptstr. 39, 8262 Ilz, Austria

or send your donation via Paypal:

just use this link: **PAYPAL**

You can also contribute and send your donation on a monthly basis.

Very best wishes and once more THANK YOU,

Oliver Leick

Director of the Shang Shung Institute Austria

phone: +43 664 8866 26 60

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## Fish Release with Drugu Choegyal Rinpoche

On July's full moon, at Bagnas tal lake in Nepal, we had the good fortune to have a fish release and blessing conducted by Drugu Choegyal Rinpoche.

Thousands of fish, endemic to the region, were released into a beautiful lake. They were first blessed with mantras and given sacred *myong-drol* (liberation through tasting) substances, this was to create a good cause for their future before being released into the wild.

*Tshe thar*, life release, is a well known practice in Tibet and in Buddhism in general.

Dugu Choegyal Rinpoche is a reincarnate master in the Drukpa Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism. He first went to Merigar in 1986 and some years later gave a teaching on Yeshe Tsogyal. He is renowned for his art and was invited by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu to paint the panel of the Twelve Primordial Masters in the Gönpa in Merigar.

You can read about the lineage of past reincarnations of the Dugu Choegyal Lineage here: <http://www.choegyalrinpoche.org/Lineage.htm>

Drugu Choegyal Rinpoche gave a spontaneous teaching about saving of lives and the importance of compassion. The original video can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKMQEemMea4>

Our deep gratitude goes to Drugu Choegyal Rinpoche who came out of his retreat to oversee the fish release and thank you to everyone who participated in this fish release organised by Shang Shung UK. We have been organising fish release in the last years and all funds raised go towards our cultural activities. ©

To learn about our upcoming activities please visit our website: <https://www.shangshunguk.org/>

You can also follow us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/shangshunguk>



Photos by Mandarava Bricaire



# Transcription of Drugu Choegyal's Words on the Liberation of the Fish

I want to say this to all human beings on this earth, our brothers and sisters, Indians, or Chinese, European, American, or Alaskans, everyone, as members of our [human] family. This is how I feel.

I was born in Tibet around 1946-7 and only came to India in 1958/9. In Tibet where I was born, in eastern Tibet, we had no concept of killing. (Rinpoche later pointed out that by 'concept of killing' he meant to say that at the time in Tibet there were no meat and poultry farms, or fish farms) no concept of my religion or my nation. We had very innocent minds because Tibet was very isolated and there was no influence of nationality and all these things.

I still have this feeling that all human beings are a family, not only of this planet but of the whole universe, all beings as family members. From childhood, our parents and everyone taught us to love all sentient beings as our mothers and parents and to make no discrimination. This was very deeply rooted in our minds because it was taught from childhood. We were not taught this just because it was Buddhism or Dharma practice. It was taught as something normal, something very natural. From childhood we were taught by our parents and by everybody to love all animals, even small insects, small creatures. We were taught not to step on them or kill them, because they are like us. They have feelings, they have the desire to live, they feel pain just like we do. So this was something we learned from childhood.

And also regarding all human beings we were not taught that we are Tibetans, they are Chinese, these are Indians, and so on. We were taught that we are all members of the same family. I really cherished this. It was only after many years of being in India that I slowly learned about this concept that we are Buddhists, they are this or that, because it was quite new to my mind.

I want to express my feeling. I am speaking just as one human being, not as a Buddhist teacher or a Tibetan Buddhist but just how I feel as a human being, how we feel toward other animals.

The most important things for human beings, for the heart, is to have mercy. If there is no mercy, no compassion, the heart



Photos by Mandarava Bricaire

becomes half dry because half is overpowered by ego. Ego is ignorant. It is actually very deceitful to us. It makes a lot of suffering for us. All the suffering we have in life is mostly from anger, envy, jealousy, desire, and greed. All these things come from ego. Ego makes us blind and this makes us unhappy. So all human beings, regardless of whether they are religious or not, of whether they are male or female, from the east or west, need to have love, compassion and mercy. As long as we are human beings we must have mercy and love to make our heart fully develop. The heart is fully developed when it is happy and the heart can only be happy when there are no negative emotions, which come from self-cherishing. Therefore this act of saving animal life is an act of love and caring for others.

There are three points. Firstly, as human beings we must have mercy and we must have compassion because this is the real wealth and happiness and meaning of human life. Human life without love or caring for others, without mercy, is not a good use of human life. Human life should be of benefit for others, not only for oneself, not only for one's own family, not only for one's own country, but for the whole world, for everybody. If everyone was taught from childhood to love all, then naturally the whole world would become very harmonious and friendly and happy. All the trouble, all the sufferings, all the fighting in this world come from the lack of education in childhood to love others. Educating [children] to become rich, to become greedy, to become selfish, increasingly brings suffer-

ing and disaster. Initially we think it will bring good things to us but eventually it brings bad things to us. Whatever bad things we do to other people will eventually turn back on us. We cannot escape. So first of all we shouldn't think "I'm Tibetan", "I'm Buddhist" or I'm this or that, but we should feel love and compassion as human beings and have the feeling of family towards all. Whether we are Indian or Chinese, or European, or American we are all one family. But as long as we have a divided mind there will be no end to fighting. As long as there is fighting there will never be a one side winner and there will be suffering on all sides.

The second point regards Buddhist teaching. If we are Buddhists the main thing is that we must have a good mind. If there is no good mind, whether we do prayers, or meditate, whatever practice we do or learn, it will be of no use. It will be totally useless. So it is important that for us as Buddhists, it is very simple- we should have a good heart. Buddha made it very clear and simple: firstly do good and not bad and discipline your own mind. This is Buddha's teaching. This is the teaching of all past Buddhas, all present Buddhas, and all future Buddhas. All the Buddhas who come to this earth will teach the same point. The Buddhas on other planets teach the same point. There is no difference.

Therefore firstly for us Buddhists we say we take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, but the main thing is not the Buddha but the Dharma. Dharma has three points: to love others, not to harm others,



and to discipline one's own ego, because ego is the main cause of all suffering for oneself and for others. In this practice, loving animals, loving others with no discrimination is very important. If we love only Buddhism and do not love others, it is not Buddhist. If we respect Buddhism but disrespect other religions it is very wrong. In Vajrayana there are fourteen sins, something like crimes, according to Buddhist vows. One of these is to have disrespectful thoughts toward other religions.

One point I like very much is that the Buddha's teaching teaches us to respect others as oneself. It doesn't mean that one drops one's faith and confidence in the teaching. One must have full faith, full devotion, and feel confidence in one's teaching because it is important to know what is there, what its value is, what its essence is. Without knowing that [we accept it] blindly. Buddha said that we should not accept it blindly and it's very clear. But the important thing is simply that once we are Buddhists we need to have good minds towards others. It doesn't mean just to some part [of humanity] but to all. So therefore regarding this aspect, loving and taking care of animals is very important.

Without considering Buddhism or other religions, as human beings we must be kind to animals. Of course sometimes man has to eat animals but when we kill them we must do it without giving them pain, not treating them like something mechanical or a vegetable. This is very important. They definitely have the same mind as us: as we want to live so do they, as we don't want to feel pain, neither do they. It is the same. But as we have a bigger better brain, we must use it otherwise it is no use having a bigger brain, a clearer mind for selfish reasons, for making trouble for others. Then this big brain becomes useless when it brings disaster to others. We must use this brain for benefitting all. As Mahatma Gandhi said, if man is cruel to animals he will become cruel towards men. This is a very deep teaching and it is true. From childhood we must train our mind to be very compassionate and not cruel so that when we grow up we will not become cruel but will be very thoughtful towards others. This life saving is part of that practice.

As Buddhist practitioners, we must progress from stage to stage. Once we take a minor vow we have to practice it, otherwise taking an empty vow is no use. When we practice the Six Paramitas the first practice is generosity. The first aspect of

generosity is giving material things. Another aspect of generosity is protection, like saving the lives of animals. The third type of generosity is giving Dharma [teaching]. This doesn't mean converting people [to Buddhism] but teaching them what is good, what is not good. If they harm others it is not good while if they help others it is good. They shouldn't be cruel. This sort of thing is good but other things are not good. This is right, this is wrong. This is virtuous, that is non-virtuous. This is moral, that is immoral. All of this is very important to teach and is the third type of generosity.

Among all this giving generosity, we have to be very generous with love and compassion. If we give material things without love and compassion, it is just a kind of act. If we save animals lives without love and compassion, just to accumulate merit or benefit, this is a selfish attitude. We must save animals lives with love and compassion. Everything we do in Buddhist practice we must do with love and compassion. When we do meditation, there should be love and compassion because meditation for self-benefit, self-enlightenment is not Buddhist meditation. It is selfish and egoistic. It doesn't reach anywhere towards enlightenment. So therefore with generosity, the first Paramita, the most important thing is love and compassion.

hope of going to heaven, no matter how much you pray, how much you spend, or how many pujas you do. Whatever you do, it is not much use. Therefore first of all one has to be a good human being. Then you should be a good religious person. And finally you can become enlightened. To go to heaven, first you must become a good human being with mercy. A good human being means basically having mercy and compassion and being very kind hearted. This is the essence.

This is what I want to share with all our friends around the world, whether they are Dharma practitioners or not. I don't care. We are all family. Thank you.

I want to thank Shang Shung Institute for giving me the opportunity to join this meritorious action today. And I want to offer deep rejoicing to all who make a contribution to the saving of the lives of the fish as well as Sri Dato and Sri Datin Loo, in Malaysia, who gave a contribution to saving the lives of the fish. I want all of you to dedicate this to the lives of all sentient beings, and temporary happiness and full enlightenment for all sentient beings. Tashi Delek to everybody. ©



Love and compassion is the base, root and seed of all the good things as human beings and from a good human being then we can have hope to go to heaven. Then from there once we have that kind of quality, only then can we think of enlightenment or liberation. Our Buddhist viewpoint as we Tibetans understand it is that without being a good human being there is no

# Interview with Menpa Phuntsog Wangmo about Covid-19, Vaccines and Protecting Each Other

**The Mirror:** Hello, Genlak, we are here to interview you for The Mirror. Today is August 6, 2021 in Conway, Massachusetts, in the Schoolhouse, the center of the Tibetan Medical School. We would like to ask you some questions about the Covid-19 situation, this great pandemic that is taking over the world and all our lives. We would like to have some advice from you, as well as some information.

**M:** The first question is, how does Tibetan medicine view Covid-19 and how is it seen in terms of the Tibetan medical diagnosis?

**MP:** In Tibetan medicine we see Covid-19, or generally any contagious disease, when we look at the element aspect, as the aggressive, excessive fire element. So it is the predominance of the fire element. Of course, also wind can participate, but it's more like fire, a lot of heat, fevers, inflammation, infections. Also the nature of it is that it progresses fast, develops fast. When the fire element is predominant, the nature is sharp and aggressive. When we do diagnostics according to the Tibetan medicine, it's what we call a *nyen*-disease – the problem is not only in the fire but the fire combined with a certain virus. We call it *nyen*, which means it's very aggressive.

When we look at the history of Tibetan medicine, it seems that in the ancient times in Tibet we had a very severe infection, or contagious disease, because the treatments developed work well. Of course, certain enlightened masters said that in future the time of *kali yuga* would come, we will have certain diseases and we should make preparations, do practices.

Back in 2000's and late 90's Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche gave a lot of teachings connected to Vajra Armor and also Garuda practice. He was not a regular person and he knew that one day his students were to suffer these kind of illnesses, and not only his students but all human beings. Last year we were affected by this pandemic, and we as Tibetan medicine doctors tried to research and practice to see how we can solve these issues. So I found that Rinpoche saw the future and what kind of problems we were going to face.

As for Tibet, this time the pandemic hit globally but Tibet was not affected. We did not have a single patient, especially in the Tibet Autonomous Region. We had only one person who flew from Wuhan to Lhasa in March last year. Of course, he had Covid-19 but he was treated and sent back. So the Tibet Autonomous Region stayed a pandemic free zone, completely clean.

Very recently we had two more cases of a contagious disease and again it did not hit Tibet. Also Tibetan people who live in China, students who study in China, teachers, professors and business people do not seem to be affected. My niece's sons are in Wuhan now, the place of the [pandemic] outburst. At that time my niece and her husband were in Wuhan, they went to pick up children, but then the pandemic hit and they were stuck there. They said, hundreds of parents were stuck there with children. They did a good job and were not affected. Later they returned home, so everyone is safe.

I thought they would do well also in the West, [as did] Tibetan people who live outside Tibet like myself or people who live here or in India, but they won't. We were affected pretty badly but the death rate is not high. The Tibetan medicine, practice and teachings helped a great deal.

**M:** That's really amazing. Two questions from what you were saying. Did the Tibetan doctors in the West do the research?

**MP:** Yes, they did a research organized by ATMA (American Tibetan Medical Association), and it's based on the data of Tibetan medicine practicing doctors who live in the West, especially in North America. Day by day they collected patients' data, and soon, in October-November, there will be papers about that.

**M:** Through that research they discovered the medicine they need?

**MP:** The medicine is not [defined] in the research, you can find medicine already in the book, in what we call *nyen*-chapter under 'epidemic diseases' topic. Inside there are 18 different types of contagious diseases, including chicken pox. Everything inside that book, for example, CDC quaran-

tine is two weeks, also in Tibetan medicine it's fifteen days. Because during these fifteen days it takes three days for every element to get the problem, then manifest this problem and then it shifts to the next. Each stage takes three days. Or there are nine days for *lung*, *tripa* and *badken*, and on eleventh day you are allowed to eat certain foods. So everything is very precise. [It is said] what you should do when your body shivers, what you need to do when you have fever, what you need to do when you have disturbed sleep, disturbed emotions, when you have fear, when you have difficulty in breathing. Relatively, everything is very precisely explained there.

I would like to thank people who prescribed Tibetan medicine, I would say, they did very well this time. Tibetan medicine really contributed this time and our service was very successful.

**M:** That's great. Did the doctors research why Tibetan people have less problems with the Covid-19?

**MP:** No, our research was [dedicated to] how the Tibetan medicine works [in regards with this illness]. We don't have the same standards as the Western medicine because we don't have laboratories and all the ingredients. But what we did is we collected data from all these sick people – how many people were treated, how many people died, how many of them began with the Western medicine with positive Covid-19 and then became negative. We did [our research] based on that.

**M:** That's really fascinating.

**MP:** Some doctors worked with 200–300 people. In my own experience, the hardest part with the Covid-19 this and last year was sending herbs to people. Due to the pandemic all post offices were too slow. For example, sending a package to New York took 2–3 weeks, and sometimes they didn't know when they would deliver. It made everything more difficult. For that reason, I tried to teach how to prepare home remedies, to make tea yourself. And all the ingredients of most remedies were what we commonly have in the kitchen. I tried to work more with this aspect because sending herbs was very difficult. One time I sent package to Canada, it took more than a month.





**M:** Fortunately, as you said, many ingredients you can find in the kitchen in the herbal closet.

**MP:** Yes, simple things like cloves, turmeric – simple things that we have in the kitchen. On top of that it's nutmeg, something you can get in a food store. Now all food stores offer a lot of spices so I really tried to work with these spices, and I would say it was very successful.

**M:** Did you also recommend some practices to Tibetan people?

**MP:** Yes, I also try to recommend some practices. His Holiness said that people should do Green Tara practice because Green Tara's nature is very fast, she can be there on time, so she is very reliable. His Holiness gave transmissions online. His Holiness Sakya Trizin said that we should do the practice of Loma Gyöngma. She is similar to Green Tara, she is wearing green leaves. Her Sanskrit name is Parnashawari. She mainly helps to protect things. For example, if someone has a contagious disease, her green leaves protect [this person, and everything] harmonizes.

In Tibetan medicine such issues as contagious diseases [are contained] in so-called 'infections' chapter, and there we have ingredients based on that practice of Loma Gyöngma – specific pills composed [according to instructions from] this practice and empowered through this practice. We also have another medicine, or formula, based on Hayagriva practice. Both medicines are very powerful. So we use them and they work very well.

In entire North America it seems three or four Tibetans died but they were two Tibetans and two Himalayan people.

**M:** Those Tibetans who died, were they older people?

**MP:** One person was from the West coast area. At hospital they first thought it was pneumonia, then something else, so they sent him back and forth. Last minute they said it was Covid-19, and on that day he died. He didn't receive Tibetan herbs. His wife contacted me and I worked with her.

**M:** How does the Tibetan medicine, if they do, view the environmental situation of the world as it is now with all the different problems of global warming, different environmental problems. Do you see that they have a relationship to this pandemic?

**MP:** It's clearly due to our misbehavior, our selfishness, our endless desires and mainly ignorance. All this causes this kind of problems. When we study the conditions of this disease, once we have these conditions, and people became more selfish, with lots of desires which they cannot satisfy, wanting more and more, meantime the ego is becoming stronger, like [distinguishing] 'mine' and 'yours', causing a lot of fighting, killing other beings, including human beings. During such times we will have a lot of natural disasters and sicknesses.

In the Tibetan medicine book it is said that one fourth of the world's [population] will vanish due to this kind of disease. Hopefully, not this one but who knows. These kinds of things are already said. Also this and last year and we had webinars with Garchen Rinpoche. He also said that we have this problem because [of accumulation of] collective karma.

During the pandemic and the lockdown time there's no much things to do and we didn't know Zoom at the beginning, it was not popular yet. So I listened a lot of Rin-

poche's teachings on Youtube, read a lot of Rinpoche's books. And I remember one time at Khandroling Rinpoche – I think it was 2015 – said that now it's time for evolution, not revolution. I didn't know exactly what revolution and evolution [mean] but what I learned is that it means that it's not something I tell you what you are supposed to do but I do it myself. And if I know some good things that I am supposed to do, instead of telling other people, I do them by myself. Instead of trying to conquer or educate other people to change their character and behavior, try to change your behavior first. This time, during pandemic, I felt that Rinpoche's teachings were so to the point.

Even if we still do not know how this disease was created, it does not matter how it came to be. Somehow it's our misbehavior. We all suffer globally so it's our collective karma. We all have this karma, as Garchen Rinpoche said. Look at nature. How many earthquakes, wild fires, water floods we had as a result of that. Every year natural disasters [happen]. Even in one country in one part there are fires for months and months, in another part there are water floods for months and months. Looks like it would be good if these two go together but they don't. So, going back to what Rinpoche said about evolution, we need to think for ourselves, try to change our behavior, try to learn to be satisfied.

Our desire is endless but the outer nature has its limits. Our desire, anger, selfishness are unlimited, but natural sources are limited. When unlimited mind want to use limited things, of course, one day they will empty. Of course, I am not only one who is doing this, we are 6 billion people, we all have selfishness, anger and so forth.

I really learned a lot during this pandemic, even if it's a strange way to say it. Connecting back to Rinpoche's teachings, teachings of other great masters and not only Tibetan Buddhist teachings, but teachings, actions and wisdom of many other great people, I really learned a lot.

**M:** I think many people appreciated the quarantine time. They could go inside themselves and practice a lot, and, like you say, reflect on our individual behavior and behavior of the world.

**MP:** I am not saying Buddhism is better because my teacher, Rinpoche, never said this religion is better than the other or that religious people are better than non-religious people. But people who learned some

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teachings, who practiced, they did much better than those who didn't. Also I really learned myself, even if we are locked down, even if we don't see anyone, we know that our brothers and sisters are around, in a sense of a community. If I want to participate, I can do it 24-hours a day through Zoom and see the global people. This really helped. When something happens, you know, you can call this person or that person. Just to have this idea. Many other, local people, who don't have this sense of a community, they did not do well at all. Children, senior people did not do well. So there is a lot of pain.

We are already in samsara, suffering, and the pandemic brought even more suffering, more global aspect of the suffering. It's an interesting teaching.

**M:** Now we get to the point about this famous vaccine. I wonder how you might feel about the vaccine. Do you feel it's valuable that people take the vaccine? Maybe there are people who shouldn't take it?

**MP:** Vaccine in Tibetan medicine is not something very new. If we look at children's birth in the Tibetan medicine, in the first days of the fetus we prepare some formulas to give them in small [quantities], so that ideally until they become one-year old, they will be protected from sickness, including contagious diseases. We have this kind of vaccine. Of course, it's not some scientific vaccine. Of course, we have mantras, which we chant or protections we wear. For example, this is my protection, my vaccine [points at her gaul]. So, we do have certain things, it's not a new concept for Tibetan medicine.

Human life is very important, you don't acquire human life accidentally. Through this human body, human life, we can do a lot of things, use our potential, accomplish our dreams. In this sense this body is very important, and we can easily lose it. The teachers give a lot of metaphors how this body is precious but if you don't pay attention to it, you can easily lose it. Sometimes our life looks very valuable but if you ask what is the value of your life, there is no price, it's priceless. But very simple things can take away our life, so it becomes very useless. For this reason, this type of vaccine – wearing a protection cord, chanting mantras, using something like chüdlen pills and many other things – is very common for Tibetan culture.

As for this vaccine, from the first day of the pandemic we waited for this vaccine. Everybody said that there's going to be a vaccine, and, as I am not scientist, I wished it would appear a little sooner and less people died. Finally, it was made, and I feel really grateful. I did the first one in February and the second one in March.

Here in Massachusetts, our center is totally isolated, no one around, my health is also relatively ok, and I thought that in my case it should be ok. I made Tibetan medicinal tea and it worked well. Anytime I felt a little strange, I made this tea and [symptoms] completely disappeared. Many people sent me letters saying 'thank you'. I sent this Tibetan tea to prevent Covid-19 to more than 300 people. But then the problem is that the pandemic stays too long, my herbs finished and I couldn't get new herbs. That's what happened. But later we ordered and got more.

Returning to your question, I think vaccine is really good. I took the vaccine and I feel more free, I feel more confident to meet with people. I feel protected myself and I feel I prevent others from [sickness].

**M:** Thank you, it was very helpful. Do you think there are any conditions of people when vaccine is not recommended?

**MP:** I don't remember exactly what CDC said. I think, they mentioned that pregnant women or breast-feeding women can consider or first talk to their doctors. That's what I also think, when you have conceived and the baby is very small, its body is not developed yet, I am not sure how it will be protected from the vaccine. This also applies to breast-feeding. Other than that, I think that ideally everybody should take it. Because also CDC said under 12 years old they don't vaccinate which means for breast-feeding women and those women who have child in their womb vaccination may not be the best option.

I will tell you why I got vaccinated at the very beginning. At first I was thinking 'maybe yes, maybe not' because I didn't see very well why I needed to take a vaccine. But then one day I was listening Rinpoche's teaching where he said that we need to work with circumstances. My circumstances were that I am in the middle of the pandemic, the vaccine is available, why shouldn't I do that? If Rinpoche were here with us, in his physical aspect, for sure he would say 'Go and get that. Why don't you get that? Do you want something happen to you? You should do that. If you don't care

about your life, respect other people's lives. You should do it.' I really feel that if Rinpoche were present in his physical aspect, he would say that to us. Of course, Rinpoche is always with us in our heart, but I mean in a more human aspect. So, I immediately decided that I would take the vaccine. I got the first vaccine on Tibetan Losar day. I thought it was very auspicious – new year, new vaccine, I am protected.

**M:** It was the day of your appointment?

**MP:** Yes, Amanda helped me to make an appointment. I got it immediately as a practitioner healer. And I got the second part on March 12. I am so happy.

**M:** I just have maybe two more questions. It's difficult for us to understand why there are happening different mutations of the virus. It seems each time it mutates, it gets stronger and maybe faster. Do you talk about that according to Tibetan medicine?

**MP:** Yes, we talk about that in the Tibetan medicine. If something appears and if you are not able to conquer it 100%, after it becomes stronger. It's like mafia. If there is mafia and you cannot eliminate it 100%, underneath they can make their plans, they can strengthen, and when they are visible again, they become much stronger than before. This is logical. Now they know how to fight back the body and whatever medicine we used. When we develop, they also develop. When we have new ideas, like a vaccine or wearing a mask, washing hands, they also develop theirs. We are like two groups of beings who both develop. The question is who will win.

At the moment we've developed well – scientists, experts know very well how to fight back with a vaccine. In the meantime it seems the virus also has a good idea how to confront these medicines and how to attack.

In Tibetan medicine we say it's very common. For that reason, when we take medicine, like antibiotic, against fever or infection, there is some period of time that you need to take it. It means if you stop before, the seed of the disease is still in the body, and one day the disease will return, and this time the previous medicine won't work.

So it's also common. If you take simple blood-pressure medicine, starting from 25 mg, every time you will need to increase to 50, 100, 150 mg. Because body gets familiar with the medicine. It's very common.



**M:** That indicates that if more people are vaccinated, the virus variant has less access, it can't move around as much as before and less mutations can arise. Is that true?

**MP:** I think so. But I am not this kind of expert. If you ask me if this vaccine is going to work or not, I really have no idea. If you ask how long it is valid, if you did one when you need to do again, I have no idea. But those experts, not only one or two, but hundreds of experts, they say and they do [certain things], and they are like us, their families suffer, doctors and nurses die, their family members die.

Now whole global beings are in one boat. We all suffer equally. I guess, the government invests money, and the scientists work on that. For sure there is some other interest in things but I think the main interest is how to save lives and get out of this issue. They said, if we, most majority of adults, take the vaccine, it's much safer for the children and population with health conditions. As a doctor I really trust them.

If one country's experts want to lie with some purpose, I don't think they can cheat 6 billion people. There is not only one or two experts, there are millions of experts, millions of scientists. One person cheating all of them does not sound [possible]. So I really trust them.

For example, I got the vaccine, today you came to see me. Somehow later you found you've got Covid-19 and you think you've got it from me. But I don't feel guilty, I did what I was supposed to do. If I didn't get the vaccine, and you or your family member or someone close to you got the Covid-19 and loses their life, then I feel I am guilty. I cannot say I killed them but it's very close to that and I will feel very badly. But if I did everything that I was supposed to do, what can I do? Maybe this is karma. Of course, I won't be happy but I will feel less guilty. This was also a relief for me once I got vaccinated. Now I can be with some senior people around when they need help. If I were not vaccinated, I would never visit them, never touch them.

**M:** Do you foresee any end with that situation with Covid-19 as it continues to mutate and finds its strength again and again?

**MP:** I think it's either Covid-19 ends or my life. I don't know which one happens first. Like other people, I hope the pandemic ends first and I will have a little bit of freedom in life. We had been wearing masks for one year, from last March till March or

even April or May this year, and we have never done that before. So it's very unusual for us. Then, suddenly Massachusetts [local administration] allowed us not to wear masks indoor and outdoor. At some places they input options. But now we need to wear masks again. I don't know whether CDC asked to wear masks or not but when I go to the post office, bank or food market, everyone wears a mask. Now, when people wear masks, it means they have small bad news. For this reason, I really hope it ends.

Yesterday Amanda and I went to Florence, my radio show. On our way back we went for a tea, and everybody wore masks and I didn't. They looked at me [as if asking] 'What are you doing?' That's why I thought it's not good news.

**M:** Thank you very much, Genlak. This is very helpful!

**MP:** I really hope that we as a global team, together, we will try to follow Rinpoche's example. As followers of Buddhism, as Rinpoche's students... how he sacrificed his life to beings. Of course, we are not able to do as much as he did. When we read stories about Buddha, he offered his body to a tigress, hungry mother, to save her babies. Of course, we cannot do that. But to get a free vaccine, to be compassionate, thinking about other beings' lives, I think that we probably can do. That's what I want to ask all my friends, Sangha, brothers and sisters. Please, consider that. ©

Transcribed from video made for The Mirror  
and edited by Anastasia Eremenko  
Final editing by Naomi Zeitz



## The School of Tibetan Medicine Announces its New Online Learning Community

Dear Friends,  
The Shang Shung Institute School of Tibetan Medicine has transformed its educational platform into a vibrant online community of learners. We invite you to join us! This new online platform is not only the new home to the 4-Year Program in Traditional Tibetan Medicine, but also to an array of new programs and courses enabling us to share the healing knowledge of Tibetan Medicine beyond the structures of specialized training and academia. We are a new community of learners looking to discover and share the transformative power of Tibet's ancient knowledge of healing together. It is free, open to all, and only takes a minute to join. To do so, please visit us here: [community.tibetanmedicine.school.org](http://community.tibetanmedicine.school.org)

We have already featured several successful programs with special guests and eminent teachers, such as H.E. Garchen Rinpoche in our inaugural event, Immersion in the Medicine Buddha Mandala, and of course our very own lineage holder and treasured fountainhead of wisdom, our illustrious Director Menpa Phuntsog Wangmo. Some of our upcoming courses include, Harmonizing the Fire Element with special guest Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche on September 11th, and The Bardo & End of Life Care with special guest Venerable Sogan Rinpoche on September 25th. Visit the above link for more information.

A part of the mission of the Shang Shung Institute is to preserve and promote Tibetan Medicine for the benefit of all. Indeed, it is difficult to overestimate the importance Tibetan Medicine has for the modern world. Its theoretical matrix of the five elements offers a transformational vision of health and wellbeing, advancing a revolution in the understanding of our human embodiment and its inextricable interconnection to the world around us. The purpose of this new community and online platform is to share the amazing insights and easy to apply methods of Tibetan Medicine in a way that allows people to experience the benefits of this complete, holistic system of medical science from Tibet for themselves. What better way to come to know this healing wisdom than through personal experience?

There are few more powerful experiences than those of healing and convalescence. I am reminded of the testimony so beautifully and articulately described by Mariela Domínguez Leandro with Shang Shung School of Tibetan Medicine Tenerife in her February article here. It is this profound discovery of not only a new intellectual understanding of our own health but the lived experience of this healing wisdom within one's own body energy and mind that we would like to share.

The Shang Shung School of Tibetan Medicine community is a place where people from all over the world from various traditions and backgrounds can come together to discover the transformative power of Tibet's ancient knowledge of healing. You are invited to join us as we journey through these levels of discovery, healing, and transformation together. ©



### THE MIRROR

Newspaper of the  
International

Dzogchen Community of  
Chögyal Namkhai Norbu

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## Long Distance Sponsorship with ASIA

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Is it possible to cultivate a relationship with someone who is light distances from us, for example beyond the Himalayas? ASIA proposes an original way to do this: long distance sponsorship.

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ASIA has been working for more than 30 years to preserve the identity and historical and cultural heritage of the peoples of the Asian continent. With long-distance sponsorship, it is able to guarantee dignified living conditions and coverage of the basic needs of children, monks and the elderly from the Himalayan areas. Over the years it has renovated and built schools and monasteries, supplied heating systems and school materials, and equipped the buildings with canteens, libraries and modern equipment.

Among these, ASIA supports four schools in the rural and more remote areas of Nepal. Because of these schools – which were rebuilt thanks to the generous help of supporters after the devastating earthquake of 2015 – Nepalese children can have an education and also be protected from trafficking, child labor and early marriage.

The four schools are located in the Rasuwa district, where the literacy rate is 54%, much lower than the national average of Nepal which is 81%. The pandemic continues to put a strain on the country, which is still in a state of emergency. To help their families many children have taken on difficult, dangerous jobs and have been exploited. In addition, due to the closure of schools in the numerous lockdowns, they have spent most of the school year at home, often in overcrowded spaces and without internet access to follow lessons remotely.



ASIA is committed on a day by day basis to shorten distances, to guarantee Tibetan and Nepalese children an education in harmony with their cultural roots, the only way to protect them from trafficking, child labor and early marriages and give them back a future.

Schools are the first place to nurture culture – especially if it risks disappearing, like the Himalayan one – through the teaching of language, history, philosophy and much more. Nepal is a crossroads of Himalayan traditions, cultures and languages, and the expression of numerous communities that often live marginalized in remote and very poor areas.

To bring about real change, continuous and long-lasting support is required. Shorten the distance, guarantee access to education for a girl or a boy from the schools of Arukharkha, Thangdor, Namuna and Dupcheshwori with 25 euros a month.

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For more information, visit the website [www.adopttibet.org/en](http://www.adopttibet.org/en), write to [adozioni@ASIA-onlus.org](mailto:adozioni@ASIA-onlus.org) or call +39 06.44 34 00 34.

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## Forty Years of Merigar

2021 marks a symbolic moment in the life of Merigar. In fact, forty years have passed since the 'Podere Nuovo' farmhouse and land was bought and began to develop as the first center of the International Dzogchen Community.

By tracing the span of these 40 years in detail we are trying to cultivate, organize and preserve a trace of everything that has happened at Merigar and that will continue to happen here. It is important to know and remember, in general, the route that has been taken and the journey made up to now in order to set out a path that can be followed in the current circumstances, without forgetting the basic principles of the Dzogchen Community, born and nurtured in the Teachings of our precious Master, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. The decision to buy some land arose from the need and the encouragement of our Master to no longer be "nomads", to have a "physical" place that would be a focal point for those wishing to know, deepen, and practice the Dzogchen Teaching that he transmitted (and, at the same time, a point of reference for those who then carry within themselves the seed of transmission).

In the early years the Yellow House was renovated, the small stupa and the 'barn' which now houses the Mandala Hall and the Library were built. Then there were many teaching and practice retreats led by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, which within just a few years attracted an increasing number of people from all over the world.

In 1990, the Gönpa was inaugurated in the presence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. It was later expanded to accommodate retreats with several hundred participants. In the nineties our Master invited the leading exponents of the various Buddhist schools to teach and this made evident the non-sectarian approach of the Dzogchen Teaching, and at the same time strengthened this place through the practices of different traditions and lineages.

From the 1980s, but especially from the 1990s onwards, several other Gars and



Chögyal Namkhai Norbu returns to Merigar after hospitalization and treatment in the United States.

Lings began to flourish around the world. The international community has become increasingly numerous and widespread throughout the globe and so in the last twenty years, in order to facilitate sharing, the webcast was introduced and is widely used.

An important moment in this journey were the celebrations of the first 30 years of Merigar, in 2011. The Master strongly urged us to open up and practitioners arrived from all over the world to participate in three days of cultural, musical and convivial activities appreciated and enjoyed by our practitioners and by all the local communities of the Municipalities of Arcidosso, Santa Fiora and Castel del Piano. Up to that time the activities of Merigar and the whole Dzogchen Community had been directed mainly at the people united in the transmission of the Master. On that occasion, the Master urged us to take our practices out of Merigar and give demonstrations of Yantra Yoga and Vajra Dance in the squares of the surrounding villages, recounting how we practitioners try to bring the Teaching into daily life. In the same villages there were meetings on education and well-being, performances and dishes cooked according to the traditions of all the

places of origin of the various members of the Dzogchen Community. It was an event that brought together students of the Master from all over the world to Merigar, and made Merigar and the Community known to many who had never even heard of it.

But more than the event itself, it is important to remember Rinpoche's strong encouragement to be open, to feel part of civil society, to remember that practice, teaching, is not just an individual path. One of the desirable side effects is to become a better citizen who plays his or her part in the world.

This aspect was further expressed in the creation of the MACO Museum in Arcidosso. It is important to remember and emphasize that one of the last public acts in our Master's earthly life was to be awarded the honor of Commander of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic, a civil and institutional recognition that testifies how important his work was for all of civil society, not just for those who follow individual spiritual practices.

In 2018 the Master, after tirelessly transmitting his precious teachings to us for decades, left his physical body. It is now the task of all of us, his students, to continue our path of evolution, to collaborate with



other students, precious virtuous companions, and thus be of benefit to all beings with whom we share this earthly dimension. Now Merigar is no longer a barren mountain with rough roads to travel to be reached as it was 40 years ago. Going along an easy road, you arrive at a place where a wonderful great Gönpa was built, an architectural work that is unique in the world, fruit of the vision of Namkhai Norbu, frescoed with images, mantras and symbols of great pictorial refinement and intrinsic power. A building capable of accommodating the most diverse activities. A few meters from the Gönpa there is the cinerarium, where the ashes of many students of Namkhai Norbu are kept. The practice of traveling companions can thus also be of support in the journey beyond earthly life.

On one side of the Gönpa there is a stupa, a Buddhist symbolic construction, made of Carrara marble, inside which the teachings of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu are preserved.

In the building that houses the Mandala Room, different types of practices take place; ancient and modern Tibetan texts can be consulted in the library and various types of courses and events are held there. The building also houses the multimedia archive, which is undergoing reorganization.

The MACO Museum is located in the nearby town of Arcidosso, where the precious collection of Namkhai Norbu is exhibited, which tells the story of the life and culture of Tibet. In the Yellow House there is a space dedicated to the administration offices of the Dzogchen Community, the re-

factory and the shop, places for socializing and sharing.

Above all, the remains of our Master Chögyal Namkhai Norbu have been held in the Great Stupa of Enlightenment from 3 October 2018, this place of great power and impact, regarded with respect by all visitors and with great emotion by all of us, his disciples.

A timeline of the main events of our history is now under construction on the Merigar website. The one that is published here is a preview of this work. In this issue of The Mirror you can see the history of the first 20 years (1981–2001) of Merigar, while in the next issue you will find the following ones (2001–2021).

## 1981

In 1981 Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, together with a first group of students, chooses Mount Amiata as the site of his first center dedicated to Dzogchen Buddhism. During the search for suitable land to host the Dzogchen Community in central Italy, a property is identified located on the hills wedged between Mount Amiata and Mount Labro. It is a long-abandoned agricultural holding, with a few hectares of land and with only one rural building in poor condition. Chögyal Namkhai Norbu identifies a suitable hill on this land to house the future temple. In October 1981 the property is purchased.

The first years are spent renovating the Yellow House, building the small stupa and the 'barn' (now the Mandala Hall and Library) and with many teaching and practice retreats led by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu which in just a few years attract more and more people from all over the world.



## 1982

During the first year, everyone participates in the renovation of the main building (later called Serkhang or Yellow House) and in the improvement of the land and infrastructure.

From 9 to 24 June the first teaching retreat with Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, whose theme is the Dzogchen Upadesha, is held at Merigar. The second retreat takes place in the same year, from December 20, 1982 to January 1, 1983.

On Monday, October 4, 1982, a particularly auspicious day from an astrological point of view, during an important meet-

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ing, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu explains his own understanding of how the Community will function: the first Gakyil and the role of the Gekö are created. Construction of the Small Stupa of Enlightenment begins, the first Stupa of Merigar.

In April 1982 the first *tarchog* flag is raised on which several mantras are handwritten.



### 1983

1983 is the year of the foundation of the Shang Shung publishing house which has the main purpose of publishing the teachings of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu and other masters, with topics ranging from Dzogchen to Buddhism, Yantra Yoga, Tibetan culture and traditional medicine, in the form of translations, commentaries, and practice texts, as well as study materials in audio, video and multimedia formats.

The Little Stupa of Illumination, the first Stupa of Merigar, is inaugurated near the Yellow House.

### 1984

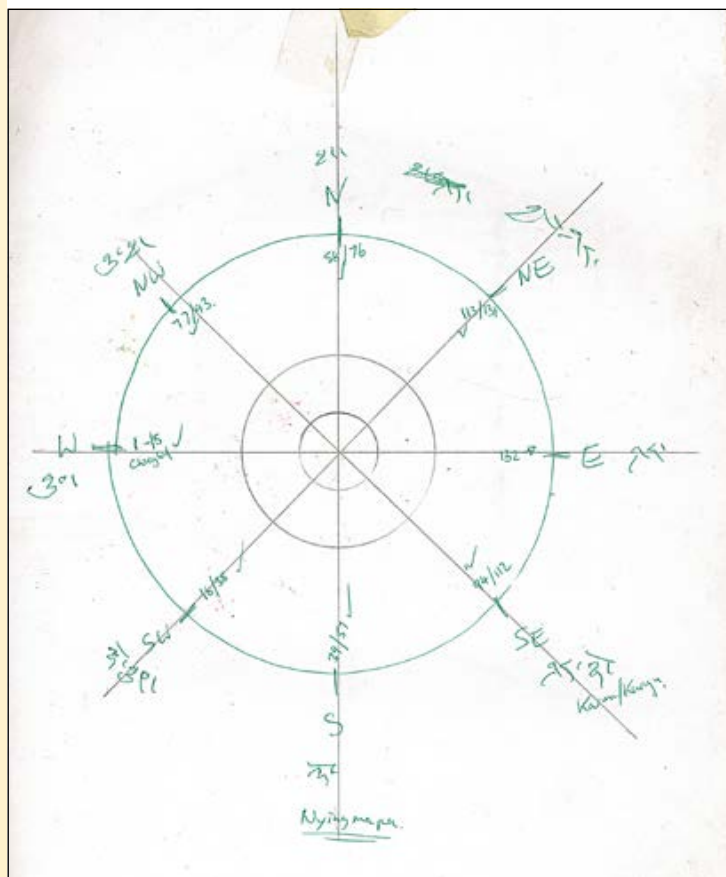
At the beginning of the year of the Wood Mouse, the first of the sixty-year cycle (rabjung), lungta prayer flags are prepared and hung and several trees are planted. The house is painted yellow and there is a veranda on the first floor. With the help of the Municipality of Arcidosso, work begins on a new road that will arrive near Merigar.

On November 23, 1984, the Dzogchen Community Cultural Association is established.



lungta prayer flags are prepared and hung.

### 1986



Chögyal Namkhai Norbu starts to design Merigar's Gönpa.



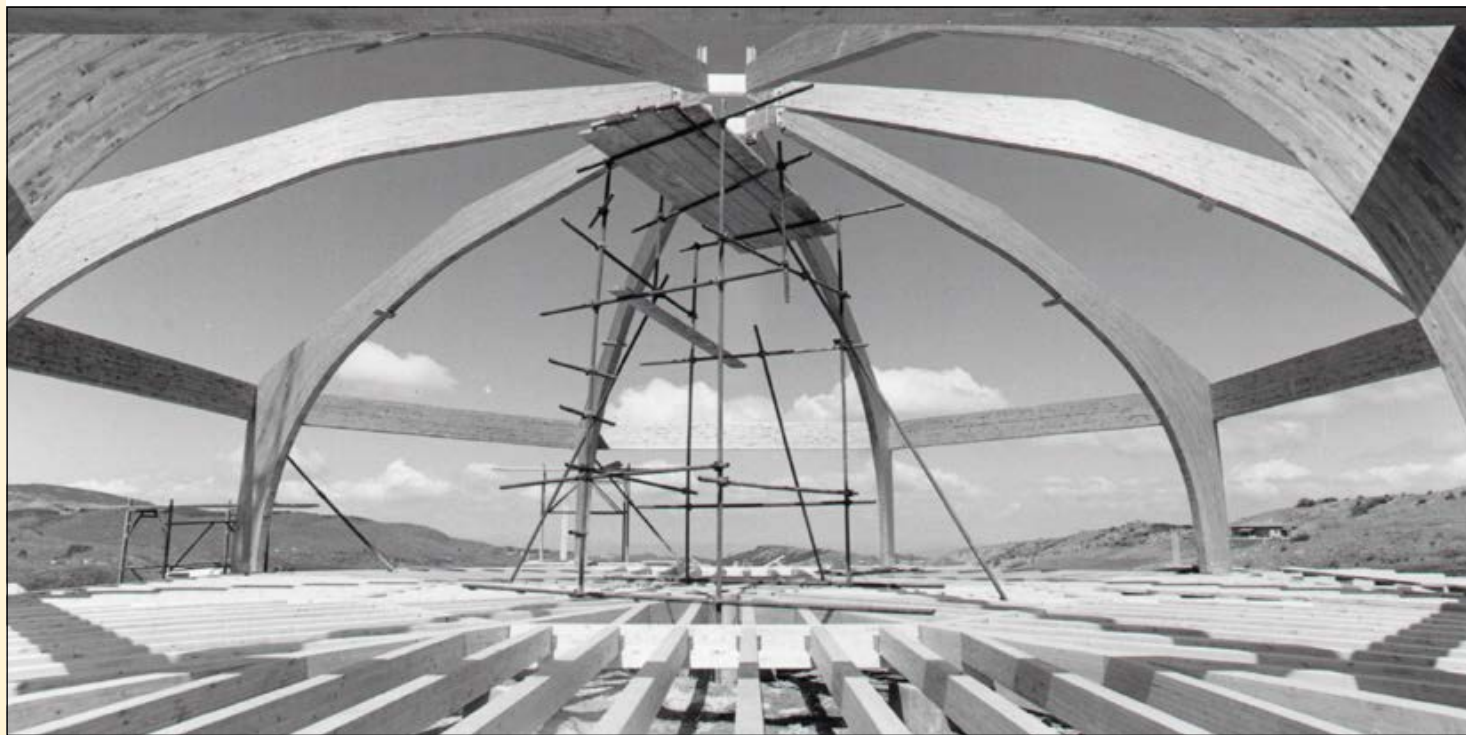
**1987**

The Zikhang building that today houses the Mandala Hall and the Library is inaugurated.

**1988**

The Municipality of Arcidosso approves the construction project of the Gönpa of Merigar.

**1989**



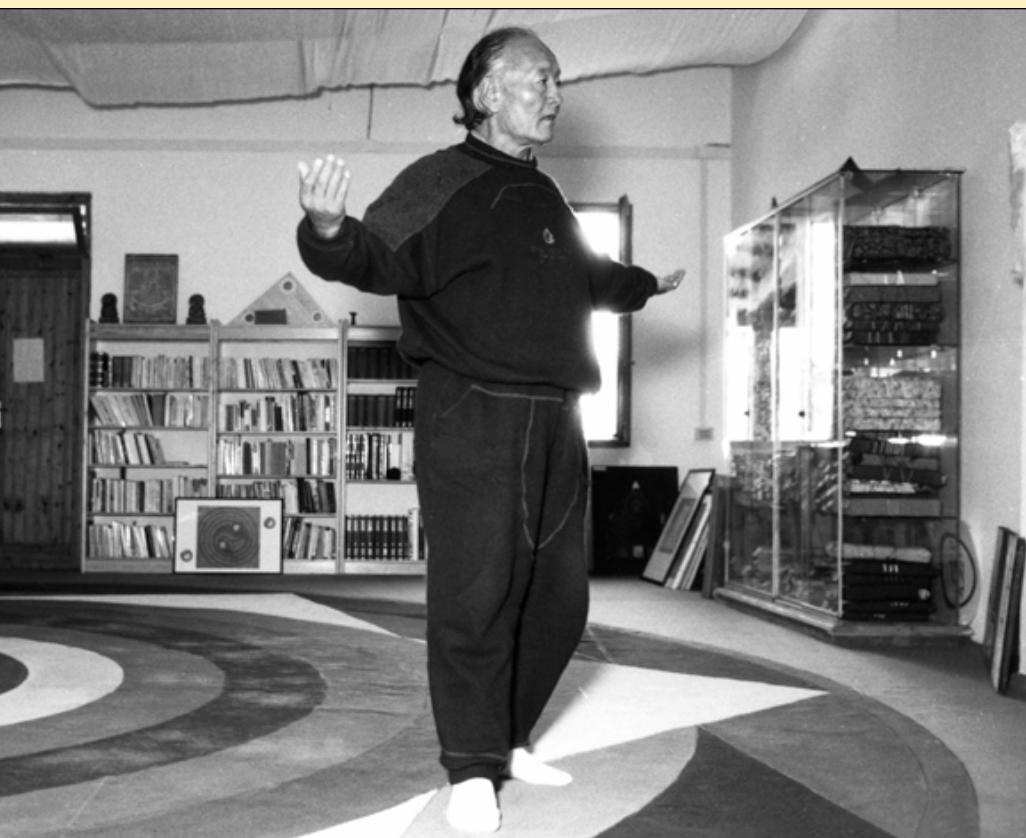
Construction of the Merigar Gönpa begins.

**1990**

29 May – the inauguration of the Gönpa of Merigar and the Shang Shung Institute in the presence of His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, the rectors of the universities of Rome and Naples, the president of the ISMEO and many other professors, including the ethnologist and orientalist Fosco Maraini. Chögyal Namkhai Norbu is invited to give the welcome address.

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In September Chögyal Namkhai Norbu holds the first retreat in the new Gönpa of Merigar.

In the same period Chögyal Namkhai Norbu teaches the Vajra Dance for the first time at Merigar, and the first mandala is painted in the Zikhang building.

**1991**

August 15-16: Celebrations for the 10th anniversary of Merigar.

**1992**

In April, in the Gönpa of Merigar, during a teaching retreat, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu presents the study and practice program called Santi Maha Sangha, which literally means "Dzogchen Community" in the ancient language of Oddiyana. The aim of this program is to train practitioners so that they are able to achieve real and in-depth knowledge of the Dzogchen teachings based on personal experience.



2nd International Seminar on Tibetan Language held in Merigar's Gönpa



The Zikhang building which houses the library and the Mandala Hall is renovated. The floor of the Hall is now made of wood and is ready to be painted with the colors of the mandala of the Vajra Dance. In the Library, a reorganization and inventory project begins.



**1993**

At the time of the inauguration of the Gönpa in 1990, the decorations, paintings and inscriptions that adorn it today did not exist. To facilitate the work of decorating the temple, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu writes an illustrated text with colored drawings in his own hand in which the symbolic value of the decorations and paintings is explained in depth. The text serves as a guide for the various painters and artists who come from all over the world to decorate the temple. The execution of the paintings, inscriptions and decorations takes place in 1993 and 1994. The translation of the text *The Temple of the Great Contemplation* is published in 2014.

The Mandala Room is inaugurated and the library cataloging project led by Dr. Mauro Nascari continues.



Chögyal Namkhai Norbu examines the decoration sketches of the Gönpa with Drugu Choegyal Rinpoche.



Tsering Wangchug.



**1994**

The work of decorating the temple continues.

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Above: Dugu Choegyal. Right: Tsering Wangchug and Sonam Palmo.





**1995**

The decorations and paintings in the Merigar Gönpa are completed.

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu returns to Merigar after hospitalization and treatment in the United States.

**1996**

On June 15 the first stone of the Great Stupa of Enlightenment is laid.

**1998**



Chögyal Namkhai Norbu with local authorities on the day of the inauguration of the Great Stupa of Enlightenment at Merigar.



**1999**

In the last weekend of May, Merigar is the venue for the celebrations of Vesak, the anniversary of the Buddha's birth, his awakening and parinirvana. The event is organized in collaboration with the Italian Buddhist Union and sees the participation of more than three hundred and fifty Buddhists, monks, nuns and lay people of the Vajrayana, Zen, Theravada and Chan traditions.

Merigar celebrates Vesak in collaboration with the UBI (Italian Buddhist Union).



**2001**

20 Years of Merigar. The enlargement of the Gönpa begins: the roof is enlarged along the entire perimeter of the octagon and the windows moved outwards. ©

Photo by Liane Gräf



Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, the Mayor of Arcidosso (on his right) and other guests at the celebrations for the twentieth anniversary of Merigar.



# The Eastern European Gar's Summer

This summer was a full one for Merigar East, with many reasons to celebrate. The lifting of some travel limitations made it possible for us to complete the filling of the second Stupa. The high interest in online retreats made it possible for us to hold several of them, with some of the most inspiring instructors from the Community, such as Oliver Leick, Fabio Andrico, and Elias Capriles. We also focused on beginners and advanced Yantra Yoga practitioners, hosting three Yantra Yoga instructors. This month, with the mild beginning of the autumn, we will focus on essential maintenance works necessary before the winter and are welcoming both karma yogis and work exchange people.

## The Stupa Filling

On July 24th 2021, the second stupa was filled. It was a big moment in the history of this project, dating back to 2010. The stupas of Merigar East are connected with the Longsal symbol path, which is at the core of the Gar's landscape. To this symbol,



Photo by Gabriella Stefanescu



Photo by Lubomir Michna



Photo by Lubomir Michna

the Gönpa, the three solar mandalas and the two stupas are connected.

The foundations of the stupas were laid in 2012 and the first stupa was finished in 2015. In 2019 the second stupa's body was constructed, but in 2020, because of the lockdown, it had to be postponed. In 2021 all the circumstances for finishing it were positive. The Gar hosted for a few weeks

many practitioners working on the stupa building, acquiring the materials, preparing the objects to be placed inside, and empowering the place with constant and focused practice. They came from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Moldova, Bulgaria and Romania.

The karma yogis cooperated while taking care of the gar and of the retreat, also

enjoying the seaside, dancing Khaita and celebrating. Zoli Cser accompanied us for four days with talks and intensive practices, including twelve hours of Vajra Dance. Migmar Tsering and Cecilia Damiani guided the filling with great dedication, making it a very special day for all of us. We are very grateful for their support!

Among the many dedicated karma yogis, we would like to thank very much the builders, Pepa, Vojta, Vláša and, for their support, Monika and Anička. Many thanks to Vitek and his family and Katka for taking care of the filling.



## Sharing practices and resources

Inspired by the successful experience of translating the retreats, thus making our activities more inclusive and shared, some of the Lings pertaining to Merigar East and the Ati Yoga Foundation decided to unite under an umbrella zoom account, to share the benefits of the translation function in a way that is more convenient for everyone. Czech, Hungarian, Romanian and Ukrainian communities have also started organizing collective practices together, online, taking turns in leading them. We are connecting for every Ganapuja and for Chöd practice. It is a great way to stay connected through practice and to feel we are part of a community.

## Courses and retreats

At Merigar East we organized three online retreats this summer, with an impressive number of participants. Online courses seem to give a wonderful opportunity for practitioners to stay in touch with the teachings and to continue to practice, in a way that is compatible with our contemporary, complicated lives.

The 25 Spaces of Samantabhadra, with Oliver Leick, Sogtig and the Tsalung of the Vajra life, with Fabio Andrico, and Dzogchen Contemplation with Elias Capriles (the latter was both online and offline) reunited participants from over 30 countries, thanks to our instructors and also to our dedicated translators!



Mandala of elements.

We also organized open courses, where people who are not already Dzogchen practitioners participated: the Mandala of the Elements with Migmar Tsering, Yantra Yoga Vacation with Honza Dolensky, Tami Rori and Oana Marcu and two open talks on Buddhism, Death and Ecology with Elias Capriles. We consider of utmost importance giving space to non-IDC members to have contact with the open teachings.

## Fantastic Summer at Kunsangar North

It is with great pleasure and joy that we want to tell you how wonderful and pleasant the summer was at Kunsangar North, Russia. The Gakyil planned and successfully conducted a series of retreats. There was a real marathon of Knowledge.

An essential retreat on Harmonious Breathing and 8 movements of Yantra Yoga with Fabio Andrico took place in June. People from various cities of Russia came to participate in it. Some travelled 1,000 kilometers to participate! Fabio explained in great detail and patiently taught the knowledge of Yantra Yoga as received from Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. Fabio connected in Zoom and at the Gar he was assisted by Yantra Yoga instructor Kirill Mironov and Harmonious Breathing instructor Mila Zakhirina. The atmosphere at the retreat was very comfortable. We were delighted to get back together and experience the power of the Community. People from Lat-

## Future plans

Next year, Migmar and Dynamic Space of the Elements are planning to come again to support a campaign soon to start regarding the Gönpa restoration. Due to the strong weather conditions and the humidity, the paint needs to be renewed, on the inner and outer walls and the walls need better insulation.

Migmar and Cecilia have already donated 1450€ to lay a foundation for the Gönpa reconstruction financing. Many thanks for their generosity! We renew the hope that our efforts will bring the possibility for this place to be available for practice for a long time to come.

Some of the most urgent works, specifically the protection paint layer of the wooden roof, are already due for this September, and we are awaiting karma yogis and work exchange practitioners. We offer work exchange practitioners free accommodation, the full support of the dedicated local team, a beautiful environment for practice and 300 euros monthly benefit.

We are also continuing the gardening works for the Merigar East Oasis: we are taking care of a tree nursery that will constitute the next batch of trees to be planted this autumn, collecting the fruits and preparing delicious Nöngdrol-empowered jam. ©



Vajra dance with Prima Mai.

via, China, Germany and many other countries participated online.

Then an offline Santi Maha Sangha and Yantra Yoga retreat with Grisha Mokhin and Kirill Mironov immediately took place. It was a very interesting format: a lecture on SMS smoothly flowed into a session of Yantra. We have learned to practically combine two approaches, two methods of Rinpoche to discover our true state. We express our gratitude to the instructors for this unique opportunity.

In July there was a magnificent retreat with Prima Mai in Zoom on the study of the Dance of the Song of the Vajra for advanced students. There is a lot of interest in learning this method in Russia and there are many dance instructors and dancers. We invite Prima regularly in order that we can master this wonderful method even more deeply. During the retreat we danced on three Mandalas, each of which had a dance instructor. Participants from many cities and countries joined in Zoom.

At the end of July we held an offline Yantra Yoga retreat "Pranayama of the third group of yantras" with second-level instructor Mira Mironova. This is a very deep and essential method for working with channels, thigle and prana. With serious study and application, it allows you to quickly advance on the path. Long time students from different parts of Russia met at the retreat, and everyone was very happy. Mira is the mother of two adorable children. We sincerely thank her for finding the time and coming to the Gar.

In August we held another retreat with Prima Mai via teleconference on the study of

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the Vajra Dance of Space, Khalongdorjekar. This is Rinpoche's Upadesha on the Vajra Dance, a completely unique method for this dimension. Each dancer, moving along the Mandala in a certain rhythm, softly sings the Song of the Vajra and dances to the sound of his or her voice. Prima Mai taught us not only the steps on the Mandala, but also the ability to feel the rhythm. In this method, you can easily learn to integrate body, speech and mind in order to develop your understanding. Lings from different cities took part in the retreat in Zoom: St. Petersburg, Sochi and Krasnodar. This is



Yantra Yoga with Fabio Andrico.



Yantra Yoga with Mira Mironova.



Santi Maha Sangha retreat with Grisha Mokhin and Kirill Mironov.

the fourth time that Kunsangar North has held such a retreat. Thank you, Prima Mai, for giving us the opportunity to study the Vajra Dance in detail.

And in between sessions, we enjoyed wonderful weather and the beautiful landscapes of Kunsangar North. We swam in the river and lake and picked wild berries.

Practice in the Gar is going on all the time, in person and in Zoom. You can book your accommodation and come to the Gar at any moment! We have the unique Stupa of Perfect Victory inside which is a room for personal and collective practice. There is a cabin for the dark retreat! There are Mandalas for Vajra Dance and the Khalongdorjekar Dance. Come, let's practice, because

Rinpoche created the Gars as places for practice and preservation of the Teaching!

With love and many best wishes,  
Kunsangar North Gakyil and Red Gakyil  
assistant Tatiana Zolotareva ©

## Samtengar, China



June 12–15 Lungsang and Kumbhaka with Tracy Ni.



June 23–29 The Dance of the Song of the Vajra with Tracy Ni.



# Namgyalgar News

On behalf of the Dzogchen Community of Namgyalgar Gakyil, Topgyal would like to thank those who donated money for the lungta purchased. This year the lungta color combinations were arranged according to each donor's birth animal.

## An update from the Gar bookshop

The newly rearranged and revamped Borrowing Library/Bookshop/Bodhishop and Office space is now up and running, including a "reading corner" where you can sit and browse comfortably. The shop has new supplies of incense, just arrived from Bhutan, and more secondhand books arriving shortly. The remaining stock from ShangShung Publications are mostly marked down and we are hoping for new stock and titles in the future. Enquiries welcomed. Please contact Hwa with any

book shop-related enquires. [hwarogers@gmail.com](mailto:hwarogers@gmail.com)

With respect to the Jinibara and Gubbi Gubbi people, the traditional owners of the incredible land of the Glasshouse region, and their elders and leaders of the past, present, and emerging © [namgyalgarnews@gmail.com](mailto:namgyalgarnews@gmail.com)



Khaita Dance Workshops in May and June.

## The Tsegylgar Summer Sangha Retreat

July 15–24, 2021

Gerard Miller

The Tsegylgar Summer Sangha Retreat took place from 7/15/21–7/24/21 at Khandroling in Buckland, Massachusetts. We were linked with our primary dance instructor, Prima Mai, Merigar West, as well as Jampaling, Padmaling, Thadriline, Sangyeling, Kunsangar North and South, Dzamling Gar, Thuy Nguyen, Natalia Makarova, Ruslan Kim and Petra Zerkova. For many of us, it was our first experience of practicing in the same moment in time with our Global Dzogchen Community.

My primary writing instructor taught me that when writing you should give as sincere and accurate account of yourself as

though you were writing to your brother and sister from a foreign land. Most appropriate today as I write to you in distant lands, united by Ati Guru Yoga, about our Gar.

In practice there is no such thing as I, but as we live in space and time, I write to you in the first person. I have been coming

to Khandroling since the 1990's. I live only 40 miles or 60 kilometers away. I would steal a morning or an afternoon from my busy life as a married father of 4 young children to partially attend retreats with Rinpoche that occurred every 2–4 years. I

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Sang at Guardian Cabin.



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was able to experience direct introduction and transmission over the years. I have been more active with our Sangha as the years pass, and while it is impossible to quantify the unquantifiable, let's just say I report to you with eyes of a beginner.

Having attended everyday of this retreat, the first Vajra Dance class was at 9:30 am, and 3:30 pm Merigar time. We could fill three dance mandalas here. There also was a 4:30 am morning class local time and I felt left out. All the fun in life is from participation. Deus est machina, I learn that our get it done Vajra Dance instructor, Bodhi, tenting nearby during this rain soaked week, has been firing up a generator in the predawn light to link us to the rest of the world. Just like that, I found my place for the rest of the retreat. To dance in the early morning light of the spacious Vajra (Mandala) Hall with a nearby instructor to point out my flaws. Even more fun was the unanticipated pleasure at session end in saying good morning, good afternoon, and good night at the same time to the rest of the world.

So many and so much to be thankful for that made this week happen. The transmission and unlimited potential of the teachings Namkhai Norbu gave to us. All of our dedicated teachers, Paula Barry, Michael Katz, Naomi Zeitz, Bodhi Krause, Vicki Sidley, Lynn Newdome, Gerry Steinberg and Leila Parker who are admired and respected. Our tireless Gaykil, Emily Luhrs, John Lafrance, Mark Alston Follansbee and David Hayes, the geko. Super karma yogis Wayne Bianucci, Ellen Halbert, Gabe Marder, Cindy Dawn, Will Shea, David Leskowitz and those I may have left out.

Our Sangha as a whole were able to have practice opportunities of Yantra Yoga, Guruyoga, and Vajra Dance. A Ganapuja took place at the end of this special retreat.

I heard many here say how they could feel Rinpoche's presence. He introduced us to presence and when we practice together we feel it in a strong way. The Sangha is our reservoir of that potential. It was wonderful to be able to be together again after this covid hiatus.

An economy of words and getting to the point whether writing or speaking is best. Practice is our strength. Zoom is a strong link I begin to appreciate. Remembering what Rinpoche usually said in his advice at the retreats end: As much as you can, be present and do your best! ©

Happy group of retreat participants selling hand made t-shirts (made by Diana Sullivan) to benefit the Gar. All photos by Wayne Bianucci



Worldwide dancers on Zoom.

Santi Maha Sangha class with Lynn Newdome.



Introduction to the Eight Movements also in the chair by Zoom with Vicky Sidley (left) and Naomi Zeitz



# Pictures from the Past

## Chögyal Namkhai Norbu in Chengdu, 1988

Raimondo Bultrini

For thirty-three years I have been meaning to recount my travel experiences with Chögyal Namkhai Norbu to other students of his. I already wrote a small booklet in Italian (In Tibet, Shang Shung Editions) immediately after returning to Italy in the winter of 1988 thanks to the editor of the Merigar magazine at the time, Cesare Spada. It contained some important moments during that journey, but it was too short and fresh to give the depth and charm of the details of a unique and now unrepeatable experience.

In the following years I transcribed – giving it the form of a travel book – the notes from my diary from the day of Rinpoche's arrival in Beijing in mid-February 1988, invited to give a series of conferences for the National Institute of Minorities that would bring us from the Chinese capital in Chengdu, to Eastern Tibet and finally to Lhasa. I continued to transcribe notes and impressions until the end of the turbulent and extraordinary pilgrimage from the Tibetan capital to Mount Kailash together with about seventy other students, all more or less linked to the different Dzogchen communities around the world.

With age and fading memory the long typescript of the diary constitutes, I believe, an important document for myself and, I hope, for all the students of the Master, even if my intention when I wrote it was to address a general public so that many things may be obvious for those of you who are preparing to read some passages here.



Raimondo in Tibet in 1988.

Today the literary form of the story appears to me lacking in depth and I hope to be able to use it as a base and clean it up from the gross errors of transcription of names, facts and imprecise circumstances. However, I do not believe that certain shortcomings completely distort the meaning of what I have saw and heard, often from the voice of the teacher who for many months would be the only interlocutor and interpreter of what was happening around us, as the only Tibetan we knew were the words of the mantras learned by heart not always with a connection to their meaning.

This first piece that I offer to the readers of *The Mirror*, with the humility of a student who was culturally inadequate for the task of accompanying a master of knowledge like Rinpoche, will not concern the actual physical journey for now. Rereading my diary I found the transcript of a talk that the Master gave in Chengdu to young people and teachers at the Institute of Minorities with which I would like to introduce the sense of the “mission” that Professor Norbu carried out in those months of events which I was fortunate enough to attend.

Many of the things said will be known to anyone who has read his books or heard Rinpoche's talks. But here they are aimed at young Tibetan and Chinese scholars as well as their teachers in order to deepen ancient history with a modern interpretation. Only by going to the root – I summarize the long message transcribed below almost entirely – can you understand the reason for the need to preserve Tibet-

an culture. But you should free yourselves from the idea of having the answers even before you have studied without prejudice, as every researcher should do. Practical invitations include studying English, a language that gives access to other types of knowledge needed to understand today's world and counteracting the tendency to rewrite history and one day transform Tibet into a museum. ©



Chögyal Namkhai Norbu (right) walking through Chengdu with his sister, Sonam Palmo, in 1988.

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# Researching Tibetan Culture

*In 1988 during his travels in the East, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu was invited to give a series of conferences in various parts of China starting in Chengdu, then eastern Tibet and finally Lhasa. The following is a translation of the transcript of a lecture that the Master gave in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China, to young people and teachers at the Institute of Minorities. His talk introduces the sense of the "mission" that he carried out in those months of events.*

**D**ear professors and students, I am very happy to be back here with you after so many years. When I was young, if I remember correctly between 1953 and 1954, I came to this school for the first time to teach Tibetan and at the same time to learn Chinese. Some of you will remember because I see some colleagues among you that I knew at the time.

Many years have passed and the students of that time have become teachers, public officials and professionals. I am happy to be here not only for the nostalgia of those years, but also because I have noticed that everyone, both professors and students, have a deep interest in Tibetan culture and for what I personally had the opportunity to learn about in these years of research in the West.

We know that Tibetan culture is so ancient that it represents a value in itself, not only for our country and our people but for the whole world. At the international level, today everyone recognizes this value as a contribution to increasing knowledge and wisdom, first of all spiritual wisdom, but also civil awareness.

We have been through difficult times. For example, I was here more than thirty years ago. Then, for various circumstances, as everyone knows, I left Tibet and came to India. I didn't have the slightest idea to leave my country permanently, but our lives also depend on circumstances.

I know there are some negative opinions about those who left. As for me, I repeat, the truth of the facts is quite different. What happened was not my intention. I never even imagined that I would have studied abroad and would have contributed in this way to the safeguarding of my culture. But, as they say in Tibetan, "A negative cause also brings good fortune". Since in that year, 1959, the Tibetan government itself had abandoned the country, I couldn't go back. So I decided to leave India, too, and look for a place where I could study and do something useful.

In this way I came to Italy where there was a famous scholar, Giuseppe Tucci, one of the first to be interested in Tibetan culture and to bring it to the Western world. He invited me to collaborate with him for two years, I accepted and left for this new country.

Fortunately for me at the Institute for the Middle and Far East that he founded, that professor had one of the largest collections of Tibetan texts in the world, possibly the largest. So I was able to



Chogyal Namkhai Norbu in Chengdu, with Phuntsog Wangmo, 1988

© 2021 Namkhai Collection/MACO

read, study a great deal and work with Professor Tucci. Of course in the early years I did not read anything but Tibetan. I didn't know Italian and the little English that I had learned in India was not useful as very few people in Italy spoke that language.

As you may know we Tibetans have many difficulties studying other languages. First of all the structure of our language is completely different from others.

Furthermore in Tibet there was no opportunity to study foreign languages. Even today, at such a distance in time, there is no Tibetan-Italian dictionary, for example. You have to use an English one.

Thus, with some sacrifice, I learned Italian. Of course the study of a foreign language is not limited just to language learning, but serves to understand the way of life of the country, its culture, knowledge and completely different customs. Those who always live in the same country may not realize this. However knowing other languages is very important and therefore today everyone studies languages in order to develop communication and to deepen their knowledge of the real world.

So I learned a lot by reading numerous Tibetan books on the one hand, and on the other hand seeing the world of the West, the way of thinking, of studying, and of doing research. And so first of all I realized the importance of culture. Before that I did not have very clear ideas on this point. I thought that the development of the economy, military strength, and the organization of government were fundamental for a country. But then, looking more closely at the life and development of Western countries, I understood that, although indispensable, economic and military development did not have the same importance for individuals as culture.





I saw that in the West primary school is compulsory for all citizens, and nowadays there is hardly anyone who has not attended primary school. For example, in Italy, not only primary school but also middle school is compulsory. This means that everyone in the West knows at least how to read and write and consequently has more ability to reason and understand at the intellectual level.

Therefore education is the very basis of the development of culture. And then, going deeper, I realized that the value of each culture is linked to the history of a country, of a people, and to its origins. I reflected on this a lot.

I have now lived more than half of my life in the West and it is probable that I will continue to live there. But I was born and educated in Tibet, so I have feelings and bonds with the culture of my country that are very alive and strong.

If there was a risk of it being lost I would not only be sorry, but I would do everything in my power to save it. And this is not only for me but certainly for all Tibetans, wherever they are, in India, in Tibet, in China. Everywhere all of us have this same feeling of gratitude.

But certainly nurturing a feeling is not enough. In some way it is necessary to act in practice, to do something to divulge and disseminate this knowledge, but above all to understand its value well. In this way I understood that I had to go back to the origins of Tibetan culture and discover its real value. After two years of working with Professor Tucci, the Oriental University of Naples offered me a position teaching Tibetan literature. So while I was doing my new job I also tried to follow the teaching activities and the conferences of other professors. This comparison was very useful for me and I thought about the fact that most Tibetan texts, at least the most accredited ones, are Buddhist. However, we know that before the arrival of Buddhism in Tibet there was Bon, the original culture, and that after the eighth century AD it was overlooked. It is the natural order of things that when something new arises in a country, everything that existed previously is considered worthless. It often happens and in Tibet it was like that. For this reason the study of our history goes back to Songtsen Gampo and no further. The origins of Tibetan culture related to the sciences such as medicine and astrology are traced back to India and also partly to China, totally ignoring everything that existed in Tibet before Songtsen Gampo.

But let's look at things in order, starting with the origins of the Tibetan people. The history books we are talking about say that Songtsen Gampo was an emanation of Avalokitesvara. Since Avalokitesvara is a bodhisattva, therefore motivated by compassion, he would be the one to bring light to Tibet, a dark country without culture or spirituality, in short, a place inhabited by savages.

Some texts even recount that when Buddha Sakyamuni lived in India, more than 2500 years ago, there were still no human beings in Tibet. A bodhisattva, probably Avalokitesvara himself, standing in front of Buddha saw a light expanding from his forehead toward the Land of Snow. When the bodhisattva asked the Buddha to explain this vision, he replied, "It is a sign of the future. Your emanation will generate the population of Tibet which will subsequently follow my teaching and the light will spread throughout the country."

Thus it was that, according to these texts, Songtsen Gampo, as an emanation of Avalokitesvara, invited the Buddhist masters from India and China, finally turning Tibet into a perfect civilization. And this is also the reason for the great devotion that the Tibetans have for the king/bodhisattva and his disciples.

But the truth is not quite what the books describe. We leave to those who believe in these things the question of whether Songtsen Gampo was or was not an emanation of Avalokitesvara. But from the historical point of view this was certainly not the main reason that pushed Songtsen Gampo to introduce Indian and Chinese knowledge in Tibet.

Before him there were at least thirty or so kings of Tibet, starting with the first, Ode Pugyal (Nyatri Tsenpo) who, living at more or less the time of Buddha Sakyamuni, certainly did not reign over an area without human beings. And from the time of that king up to Songtsen Gampo all the kings and the people followed and practiced the Bon religion. So it wasn't a dark country as they say but there was a culture, there was spiritual knowledge.

Furthermore, prior to Ode Pugyal himself, in the territory of what today is called western Tibet, there existed a famous kingdom known as Shang Shung. This was the original kingdom of the Tibetan people, with its capital near Mount Kailash, and was divided into three areas: inner, central and outer Shang Shung. Central Shang Shung corresponded to the region of Kailash, where the capital was always based, outer Shang Shung to current central and eastern Tibet, while inner Shang Shung encompassed vast territories around the chain of the Karakorum and included some regions of the former Soviet Union, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Therefore it was an empire that was vast and mighty.



Left Keng Leck, center Ayang Tulku, front center Alex Siedlecki. Photo courtesy Keng Leck

As for Tibet, in its beginnings it was a small kingdom that was a tributary of Shang Shung. In times when the methods of government were not like those of today, such a condition meant at the most having to refer to that distant authority which sent its representatives from time to time and demanded the payment of some tax.

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Historically, or going back more than 3890 years, Shang Shung was also the home of Bon. The master of the origins of this religion was called Tonpa Shenrab and his main supporter was a powerful ruler of Shang Shung, King Khri Wer.

Tibetan history begins at that time. There are in fact written records of the events and we know from that time that eighteen famous kings were on the throne of Shang Shung. Then Tibet was born which, albeit with a new name and other kings, was still dependent on Shang Shung, not only because, as we have seen, it paid tribute, but also because its cultural origins were the same as Bon.

And wherever there was Bon, there was also the power of Shang Shung in some way. Thus it was that, after seven Tibetan dynasties, some kings began to want to bring the power of the Bonpo priests under control.

In particular the eighth king of Tibet, Gri Gum, went into battle against these priests killing many and destroying the monasteries. But the country and the people all had their roots in the ancient religion and were loyal to its representatives. The king was assassinated by a minister before he had time to complete his project and in the end, things returned to the way they were before.



On the left Rinpoche, Alex Siedlecki, Cheh Goh and Keng Leck. © 2021 Namkhai Collection/MACO

Other kings tried unsuccessfully to eradicate Bon, until the time of the famous king Songtsen Gampo. He was a highly intelligent king and immediately established a series of dynastic alliances, asking for and obtaining as wives firstly a princess from Shang Shung, then one from Nepal – at the time, a kingdom that was a precious bridge of communication with India – and finally a Chinese one.

Songtsen Gampo's plan was certainly not just that of taking wives or establishing diplomatic relations, but that of importing from their countries of origin the knowledge that would allow them to create a new Tibetan culture.

In the Buddhist version of the story, which is the official one, before Songtsen Gampo writing did not exist in Tibet. So one day the king sent his minister to India to learn Sanskrit and on his return both the writing system and the grammar changed. Hence

Songtsen Gampo was considered to be the savior of Tibet and the bearer of civilization. But the truth was not exactly like that. A writing system existed and had been in use for some time throughout Shang Shung, including Tibet, but the king wanted to create an alphabet that belonged entirely to his reign. Today a script using capital letters and called *uchen* is used in Tibet while the ancient script derived from Shang Shung is used in italics.

It is therefore clear that, although a form of writing existed, the Buddhists preferred to imply that it was a king of their religion who invented one and gave it to the Tibetans. In this way Songtsen Gampo nevertheless succeeded in his purpose. He brought Buddhism to the country by inviting masters from China and from India, thus creating a new culture that took the place of the old.

This choice certainly contributed in a decisive manner to developing and completing Tibetan culture, but by attributing all the credit to India and China, he made the mistake of ignoring the value of the native Bon tradition.

However, it was actually Songtsen Gampo who was the first to control the power of the Bonpo priests, while later on one of his successors, Trisong Detsen, invited the great master Padmasambhava and the learned Santaraksita, built the temple of Samye and eliminated much of the Bon tradition of that time. Trisong succeeded positively in this endeavor of his because he did not simply destroy but gradually replaced, created and developed the new Buddhist culture.

The era of Songtsen Gampo was finally marked by another important historical event, the end of Shang Shung. It was in fact annexed to Tibet after Songtsen Gampo killed the king and not even the name of the former powerful empire remained.

This is the story that explains why Songtsen Gampo brought Buddhism to Tibet, not because a religion didn't already exist, or because the country was in the dark, inhabited by savages. There was rather a specific political motive.

I think it is very important for all of us interested in Tibetan culture to understand all of this. Because a culture like ours, whose origins go back more than 3890 years, has a historical value that is not inferior to those of cultures such as the Indian or Chinese. And the history of a nation that has existed on this Earth for such a length of time cannot be ignored because it represents a world treasure.

If we don't understand all of this people will continue to consider only the folkloristic aspects of minority nationalities and ethnic groups, without considering the value of their culture. It shouldn't be like that. A profound knowledge that has existed for four thousand years, that is still alive and is passed on is something great and important and cannot be lost.

There are many cultures on earth and certainly all of them have their own particular value and must be safeguarded. But how many of these cultures contain universal values? Take for example, the theories on the origin of man in Tibet. When they speak of man's origins many Tibetan scholars claim that, according to ancient Bon, everything arose from the cosmic egg. Other scholars laugh at this theory and consider it to be nonsense, while still others claim that the principle of the cosmic egg is not originally from Bon but was borrowed later on from Hinduism and Shaivism.





If a scholar supports certain theses right away everyone is ready to believe him or her. Why? Because they think that Tibet is a little place that may have its own culture, but certainly not the history and the value of the knowledge acquired by other older and more important nations. Even if Tibetan culture was the most original traditions these scholars always ask themselves: where does it come from? From China or India?

Let's go back to the example above. Thinking about it, even if it were true that the theory of the cosmic egg comes from Shaivism, one must always ask about the origin of Shaivism itself, which in the sacred texts of this religion is located on Mount Kailash. But where is Mount Kailash? It is in Tibet, certainly not in India. More precisely, it is the heart of the ancient kingdom of Shang Shung, the homeland of Bon. Hence, Shaivism, and all its theories, come from the Bon and not vice versa.

Of course this is just one example. But if we think about it many other similar cases can be found. If we do not think, we do not give any importance to these aspects that are linked not only to the knowledge of general concepts, but above all to the values of existence. Let's take another example. It is said that, as human beings, we have a physical level, but also a mental one. The mental one is deeper and more difficult to understand.

Regarding this aspect, in the tradition of the Bon there also existed the Dzogchen teaching, a term used in ancient times to define the Bon of the pure mind. It is such an important teaching that in Buddhism, in Tantrism, the finality of knowledge is considered to be Dzogchen. Therefore, if, three thousand years ago, there was already such a profound interest in the nature of the human mind, comparable to a philosophy, one can better understand the great value of this culture.

But the culture of a country is tied to the people. If the people do not apply it and do not live with this culture, if it exists only as intellectual knowledge, you can understand that, more or less, it's a dead culture. I say this to you students because you have come here from different areas of central and eastern Tibet, from Qinghai, from Kansu, from Yunnan, just to understand more deeply these aspects of our culture, which I hope you will develop through study and research. And it is important to do this research with an open mind. Do you know what this means? It means that a researcher doesn't have to necessarily belong to or be against a religion, or consider oneself an atheist, a materialist. If someone is conditioned by these limits he or she is not carrying out serious research. Doing research does not mean limiting oneself, or trying to learn more about aspects that can be justified by an ideology that has already been established.

A few years ago I happened to see many Tibetan books printed in China and Tibet, especially texts from the Buddhist school. Somewhere I always found written: "It has been decided to print this book even if it does not follow the principles of materialism ...". This is like officially establishing that everyone must follow the point of view of materialism.

On the political level I do not know what to say and maybe it can be justified. But this cannot be the approach of those who want to do research. Research means reading, studying anything, be it Bonpo, Buddhist, or ritual. It doesn't matter where it comes from



ChNN, with Cheh Goh and Keng Leck, leaving for Derge from Chengdu, 1988.

Photo courtesy Keng Leck

if it helps to discover what the truth is. And in the Western world, many real researchers have achieved important results by applying this method, without setting any limits. So I hope you do, too.

The value of man is that of being free, and being free he applies, seeks and distinguishes between good and bad. Those who know how to do research probably know how to find their own identity as individuals, finally.

I hope you are able to continue on this level, study and deepen [your knowledge]. With this wish I greet you and hope to meet all of you again. ❀

Translation from the Italian by L. Granger

# Heart Advice from Changchub Dorje

The Heart Advice from the Tibetan meditation master Nyakla Changchub Dorje: A Concise Teaching on Seeing, Deepening, Responding and Arriving according to Dzogpa Chenpo Kadak Trekcho.

KYE HO!

dear children – listen closely!  
what you call “mind” isn’t  
anything at all  
allow your own mind to look at  
itself.

past thoughts are no longer here,  
and  
the future’s not yet here  
and whatever arises now  
is beyond reckoning.

let all thoughts  
the past, present and future  
settle, right now,  
and in this moment  
see how it is

if you see  
colors & shapes  
this is a sign  
you’ve wandered  
into the house of delusion

if you think “it’s nothing, there’s  
nothing”  
you’re trapped  
in the numb empty state  
and the richness of your own  
nature  
will not emerge

you know,  
you can investigate  
meditate for a hundred years  
and not be  
moving towards freedom

great natural perfection  
is present  
awareness right now  
no thoughts & conditions  
clear & radiant – like the sky



Painting by Wilvin Pedersen

this never changes  
it is dharmakaya – the primordial

clear & radiant awareness  
is unceasing in its splendor  
it is sambhogakaya – the  
rapturous

the arising of all possible things –  
an ever present vibration  
it is nirmanakaya—the magical

whatever  
whenever something happens  
don’t do  
anything  
with it  
let it  
settle by itself

thoughts are fuel  
flaring up &  
toxic

let them come

and go  
they will  
dissolve into space

coming  
going  
no difference

when they come  
look directly  
how they come  
when they go  
look directly  
how they go

it is  
exactly  
the same, no  
favorites no  
choosing



eating  
sitting  
walking  
standing  
sleeping  
talking,

whatever  
you do,  
when  
    you do it  
look directly  
how you are

this is how  
ordinary beings  
become buddhas

nothing is more direct  
than this  
    more profound  
    than this

teaching

& for those who rely  
on this

teaching

causes & conditions are gone  
this is the space  
just this

directly know  
every experience  
is magical

the wisdom eye  
is now open  
clairvoyance  
now here

your body is no longer solid  
you can travel unrestrained

death time comes &  
    your material and vital forces  
    break down

and your elemental energies  
    transmute  
into the blessings  
    of rainbow remains

never changing  
it's now dissolved  
back into  
    the primal state

awareness settles back  
into space  
    Dharmakaya—the primordial

and it activates  
    all tangible dimensions  
releasing enlightened activities  
bringing benefit  
    to all who live  
    wide as space itself

this is how it is.

now bountiful benefits  
will flow

BE HAPPY! GEY-O!



This one page text in Tibetan, entitled *Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje'i rdzogs pa chen po ka dag khregs chod lta sgom spyod 'bras don mdor bsdu bstan pa*, was translated by the late Steven Goodman, at the urging of Lama Wangdor, on 25 June 2005 in Oakland, California. Disciple of Nyag bla Padma bdud 'dul, Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje, whose dates are sometimes given as 1838–1953, was the principal Dzogchen teacher of the contemporary master Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche.

Republished with permission from *Tibetan Literary Arts*, curated by Marit Cranmer, published by Shang Shung Institute, Neilson Library, Smith College, May 2007.

## Drawn and Written in Stone

An inventory of stepped structures and inscriptions on rock surfaces in Upper Tibet (ca. 100 BCE to 1400 CE)

John Vincent Bellezza  
Bar International Series  
2995/2020 BAR Publishing  
Pp. 311 soft bound

Giorgio Dallorto

John Vincent Bellezza is a famous archaeologist and historian specialized in the pre-Buddhist heritage of Tibet and author of many books and numerous articles on the ancient history of the Tibetan plateau. This literary work does not emerge from cold intellectual research based on literary documentation found in libraries, but from a research done *in situ* with the assistance of local people over a period of eighteen years (1995–2013) during twenty different fieldwork expeditions. This new book explores ancient markings on cliffs, caves and boulders that describe the religious history of the highest reaches of the Tibetan plateau through rock inscriptions and rock art entrances, witnessing the early religious tradition of Buddhism and Yungdrung Bon.

The book is a joy for the eyes with its hundreds of photographs of stepped structures and inscriptions and enriched with numerous drawings as well as many illustrations of small copper-alloy objects or *thog-lcags*. The famous Tibetan author and visionary, Orgyen Lingpa, referred to the “four portals of virtuous royal practices”: the first guarding royal tombs, the second residing in castles, the third establishing temples and raising *stelae* with edicts, and the fourth elevating the practice of inscribing stone surfaces. Following these instructions the creation of rock inscriptions was a natural outgrowth of those cultural activities during the Imperial period in Tibet.

The current state of Tibetan epigraphy is highly increased by this work which furnishes a comprehensive survey of stepped structures, *chorten* and rock inscriptions carved or painted in Upper Tibet.

The work is based on two major bodies of material evidence: rock art and rock in-

scriptions. The rock art and inscriptions of Upper Tibet are records of religious activities from the Protohistoric period (ca. 100 BCE to 600 CE), the Early Historic period (ca. 600–1000 CE) and the Vestigial period (ca. 1000–1400 CE).

There are many kinds of petroglyphs and pictographs with representational and symbolic imagery in Upper Tibet. They provide a rich complement of information on the cultural, social and religious background beginning in the late Bronze Age and reveal the architectural and religious character of the region.

Stepped structures consist of two major types of monuments: elementary shrines or tabernacles and their main counterparts in Buddhism and Yungdrung Bon, known as *chorten* in Tibetan and *stupa* in Sanskrit. The bulk of rock inscriptions in Upper Tibet are religious in character and mostly comprised of mantras.

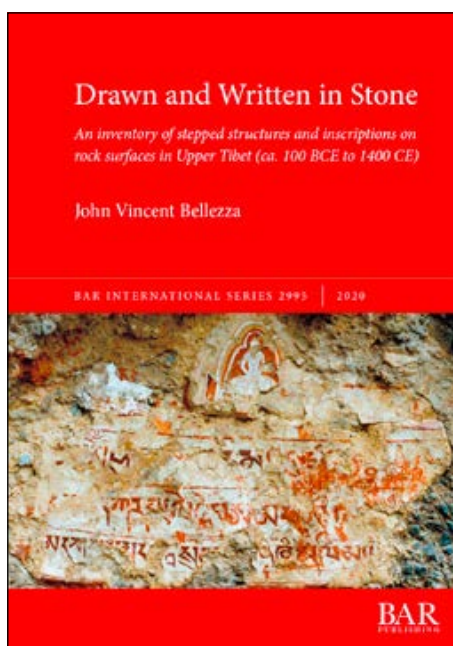
The book starts with a general introduction explaining the method and perspective followed by the author. The first part of the book composed of five chapters gives a complete overview of stepped structures in the rock art of Upper Tibet.

In the first chapter there is a short overview describing site names, country location, types of rock art, sites and criteria adopted with a classification by historical period.

The second chapter describes the origins of stepped structures in Upper Tibet in literary and ethnographic records. Among them we find beautiful color illustrations with detailed descriptions of famous copper alloy talismans (*tog-lchags*) as well as stone artefacts.

The third chapter is highly interesting from the artistic point of view with its presentation of black and white drawings of 232 stepped structures. The structures illustrated are organized into twenty typological groupings based on their forms beginning with the simplest type, progressing to more complex examples, and culminating in non-Buddhist and Buddhist *chorten* of considerable intricacy. A beautiful inventory of the typological illustrations is presented here drawn by Rebecca Bellezza and other artists with particular delicacy and beautiful drawings.

The fourth chapter talks about the cross-cultural influences of the stepped structure rock art of Upper Tibet and the north-western territories and its dissemination and transfer of cultural implication



to contiguous countries such as Spiti, Ladakh, and northern Pakistan.

*Chorten* rock art in Spiti consists of simple styles with rock inscriptions dating back to the Early Historic period. Also in Ladakh elementary stepped structures and *chorten* are composed mostly of petroglyphs, with various types of stepped structures that are unique to Ladakh. The epigraphic status of Ladakh is different to that of Upper Tibet with inscriptions in Kharosthi, Brahmi and Sarada, many of which are accompanied by *chorten*. As in Ladakh, there is a huge amount of rock art in the northern areas of Pakistan (Gilgit-Baltistan) including a great many stupas. This chapter is also enriched with many black and white drawings describing visually this type of simple but attractive art.

The first part of the book closes with the fifth chapter consisting of a beautiful photographic catalog of stepped structures with more than 220 close-ups in color. This is the heart of the book and represents an important contribution from the documentary point of view.

The second part starting with chapter six presents a comprehensive survey of early rock inscriptions in Upper Tibet. It introduces and describes the ancient rock inscriptions of Upper Tibet and analyzes their cultural and historical significance. Those inscriptions, written in Tibetan or a "Tibetanized" form of Sanskrit, provide a tool for a better understanding of the religious complexion of the western Tibetan plateau. The chapter ends with a useful list of locations of sites with rock inscriptions.

Chapter seven recounts the history of Upper Tibet rock inscriptions describing the variable development of epigraphy on the western Tibetan plateau. The oldest rock inscriptions in Upper Tibet were written in old Tibetan and these epigraphs significantly increase the relatively small body of extant literature composed in that language. They also give a fuller understanding of its grammatical development by taking a place between the written and oral language.

In chapter eight there is a palaeographic analysis with palaeographic methods of dating and typology of Upper Tibet rock inscriptions. Old Tibetan of the early historic period was written in non-cursive block letters, known as *dbu-can* (letters with heads). There were several types of *dbu-can* script (*yig-gzugs*) in use in the Imperial period and Post-Imperial period, which were inscribed on various types of writing surfaces.

Beautiful pictures show the palaeographic typology of the Early Historic period and the Vestigial period and describe the physical qualities of rock inscriptions like the type of calligraphy, the lineaments of the letters, and the orthography of the inscriptions. The palaeographic tradition in the rock inscriptions of Upper Tibet quite commonly include head marks in mostly standard calligraphic form.

In the ninth chapter a brief analysis from the statistical point of view has been done explaining the doctrinal significance of the mantras and rituals in Buddhism and Bon.

The tenth chapter, the most attractive and richest part of the book, offers a beautiful photographic catalog and readings of Upper Tibetan rock inscriptions with 525 examples, depicted in 394 color photographs. Each engraving or painting generally includes a photo with caption, a reading of the inscription in Tibetan, the type of Tibetan script used, grammatical marks, and English translations.

The book ends with a complete and exhaustive bibliography particularly useful for scholars and all those interested in discovering the ancient history of Tibet. Reading this book gives the impression of walking with J.V. Bellezza through the mountain passes of the Tibetan plateau, discovering together with him, although in a virtual way, the beauty of archaic monuments and rock art of a relatively unknown and fascinating country. ©



Tuula Saarikoski, our vajra sister for four decades, passed away in Helsinki, Finland, on July 15th 2021 at the age of 84 years. She was born in 1936 in Vyborg (Viipuri). A few years later the turmoil of the Second World War started, and in 1944 the family had to flee the war. Vyborg with large parts of the Karelia region had to be ceded to the Soviet Union, so there was no way back. The family settled in Helsinki. In 1958 she married the author, poet and translator Pentti Saarikoski and they had two children. After their divorce in 1964 Tuula raised the children as a single parent while making a professional career as a journalist at several women's magazines, and as public relations manager at the fashion and design company Marimekko.

Tuula said that ever since her childhood, she always had the comforting knowledge that at the halfway point of her life, at 40 years, everything would change for the better. When Kalu Rinpoche visited Helsinki in 1977, Tuula went to the public talk as she wanted to see a real Tibetan lama like the one she had read about in Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*. She ended up translating first the public talk, and later a teaching session, and in the end she participated in the Avalokiteshvara initiation. She started to apply the practices she had learned. After some time she started to visit and receive teachings from Lama Ngawang in Stockholm, who, however, consistently avoided giving her the transmission to do the Ngöndro.

At the beginning of the 1980's Tuula heard about a teacher called Namkhai Norbu. Following her intuition, she wrote to Rinpoche to invite him to teach in Finland. At that time his schedule for the year was already set, but the following year it was possible. Rinpoche arrived in Finland for the first time on September 3rd 1981, with young Yeshe Namkhai and Nancy Simmons travelling with him. The teachings were held at Tuula's apartment in Helsinki, with Nancy and Tuula translating. Some time after Rinpoche and his entourage had left Finland, Tuula realized to her amazement that she had already met Rinpoche many times in her dreams over several years. He didn't appear as a teacher in her dreams, but as an owner of a white house. But after the visit she remembered a dream in which she made the exact same walk in



Tuula Saarikoski.

downtown Helsinki with the dream Rinpoche, as she now made with the real Rinpoche and another student. It was concrete proof that such incredible things are possible, and Tuula was sure beyond doubt that she had found her teacher. Rinpoche visited Finland once more in 1982, for a teaching retreat in Ilomantsi, close to the Russian border. A third visit was also planned, but had to be cancelled because of the nuclear accident in Chernobyl.

Starting in 1988, Tuula lived for four years near Merigar, where among other things she was an editor of *The Mirror* for some time. During those years she also translated into Finnish Umberto Eco's *Il Pendolo di Foucault*. Several Finnish practitioners stayed at her house when they came to Merigar.

Tuula described her encounters with Tibetan teachers and Buddhist teachings in two books, *Tiikerin polulla* and *Valon ydin* ("On the Path of the Tiger" and "The Essence of Light", respectively). These books provide (regrettably only to Finnish readers) a wonderful view into the early days of the Dzogchen Community, and have inspired many and served as the secondary cause for some to connect with the teachings of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. She also translated several essential books such as Sogyal Rinpoche's *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* and several books by HH Dalai Lama and Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche.

Tuula created connections with many Buddhist traditions, and was well respected also by members of other dharma groups in Finland. For many she was the contact person and guide necessary in the beginning steps of the path of evolution of

the mind, either in person or through the books she wrote. Tuula was also a founding member of the Finnish-Tibetan Cultural Association, and organized the Dalai Lama's three visits to Finland in 1988, 2006 and 2011. On the first visit he gave on Tuula's request a talk about Dzogchen. The teaching His Holiness gave can be found in the book *"Dzogchen: Heart Essence of Great Perfection"* (Snow Lion). On a later visit, when His Holiness arrived in Finland and Tuula was at the airport to meet him, he greeted her like an old friend.

Tuula excelled in finding clear solutions in unclear situations. She would adapt to changing circumstances, such as those that arose during the visit of Chimed Rigzin Rinpoche she was co-organizing with the Finnish Khordong group in 2002. The venue for teaching and accommodation was booked and participants were present when the news arrived about the serious illness of the teacher. Would the retreat be cancelled? Tuula's solution was to not cancel anything: first make some soup together, then start doing practices, and dedicate the weekend for the health of the ailing teacher.

In her memoirs Tuula wrote: "Life and dream are alike: once they end, you can't bring anything with you. Not your name, not your property, not your prestige, no fruits of your labor. When you wake up from a dream, you often only remember that there was something. It might be that way also with life. If I have a chance to choose my rebirth in the bardo, I'll be happy to become a human in this nice place with these people".

Clarity of mind and expression were characteristic of her. We will miss Tuula's presence and her direct way of expressing her opinions.

With gratitude and on behalf of the Dzogchen Community members in Finland, The Finnish Gakyil ©

# Artists in the Dzogchen Community

## Nelida Saporiti

**M**y name is Nélide (Neli) Saporiti and I live in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Music and singing have been central parts of my life since my early childhood. In one of my first memories I remember my mother putting in my hands a *caja*, an indigenous musical instrument from the Northwestern provinces of Argentina, where they used it to accompany songs in the *Quechua* language first and later in Spanish in the form of *coplas* (four verses of eight syllables), that during our history have been used to express feelings of joy or grief. At that time, I also started to learn folk dances.

We used to sing with my mother, with my aunts, my uncles and friends who visited us, sharing meals and music. My family followed the tradition of the *'payadores'* spontaneous improvisers of verses who are very skillful in establishing a "combat" of music and poetry on many different subjects.

Over the years, I realized that my mother had been a renowned folk and tango singer. Together with her sister they formed a very famous duo. My mother dedicated herself to family life while my aunt continued as a soloist, and turned out to be one of the most famous popular singers of Argentina. Their warm and powerful voices, when female singers were not very well seen by society, and the way they had to express feelings left a deep mark on my soul.

During my childhood and adolescence, I studied piano and musical theory at the Conservatory of Music, without abandoning singing. I went to a Catholic school and when I was eleven years old, my teacher – a young nun – discovered that I sang in tune and that I had a "good voice". From then on, I started to be the lead voice in school ceremonies, as a type of intuitive choir conductor. From my years of Catholic education, I remember the hours I spent in the solitude of the beautiful chapel, because they had told me that if I stayed there in silence, I would be able to listen to the voices of the angels. I must have heard something in my heart, because I believe that those were my first meditations. There, we also learned Gregorian chant while an old nun



Nelida with Aldana Bello at Teatro Municipal Roma.

played the magnificent organ of the chapel. Later on, I continued singing in several vocal groups, including the *Estudio Coral de Buenos Aires*, considered one the best vocal ensembles of Argentina.

After the long pause I took in order to complete my university studies on Psychology and to start my family, I resumed my musical activity. I did many concerts as a soloist in which I liked to sing a *capella* and put together several different composers from Monteverdi to Ravel, Schönberg, Ives or Cage, Gershwin, Piazzolla and some popular music. I sang in theaters, halls and Festivals both in my country and abroad. I alternated those concerts with my participation in a vocal group of jazz and soul, a rock band and the choir.

After some years, it was very difficult for me to continue with such a diversity of genres, styles, schedules and obligations. During this intense period I felt overwhelmed and needed to find a center in the middle of the turmoil. I went to the USA and followed the teachings of several teachers. I returned to Argentina feeling a little bit sad because I hadn't found what I was looking for, but it was impossible for me to define.

Later, when I met Chögyal Namkhai Norbu during his first visit to my country, the impact of his teachings made a definite change in my life. My heart was beating fast, I felt tears running down my cheeks and, at the same time, I felt immense joy, as if I were arriving home after a long journey.

With Rinpoche, all my previous doubts dissolved. I remember that in those days we had several sessions of teachings

during the daytime, and we finished with the beautiful melodies of the *Chöd* practice at night. Slowly, my life started to become simpler, and I learned to live in a more relaxed way and to commit to the *Dzogchen Community*. I left the choir, the vocal soul group, the rock band and went to India and Nepal with some other practitioners for a retreat with our Master in Khatmandu. After that, I continued traveling through different places, and visited the Dalai Lama (who I had met in Argentina) at Dharamsala. The journey ended with me staying a long period at the monastery of Tashi Jong together with my daughter, who had arrived some weeks before with a group organized by Gerardo Abboud. That was my first retreat of practice, and I remember the chants of the monks coming from the monastery, with their drums shaking the air.

When I came back to Argentina, I felt pretty much confused. Something had opened inside me and I couldn't find the way to channel it into my ordinary life again. During that time, I started experimenting with my voice and began to teach singing and extended voice techniques. I taught privately, and at the University and in Theater schools. I participated in some concerts, but much less than before. So I spent several years doing so, alternating music and teaching with many trips with our Master, learning the Vajra Dance and attending courses of teacher's training. I felt immediately a great affinity with the Dance that we learned directly from the Master during our first retreat at Tashigar South at the end of 1990. The integration of sound, movement and contemplation, sharing the mandala with other practitioners, made everything calm and radiant at the same time.

Later, some events changed again the direction of my artistic path. In one of my many trips I decided to attend a workshop in the Czech Republic with the singer Ida Kelarova. It was an intensive experience of Theater, Dance and gypsy songs organized in a small town. As we arrived late at night, and it was dark, I never knew where we had been. Those gypsy songs revived direct emotions that I had experienced before with the indigenous music and the *coplas* from my country. I returned home with a





clear intention of recording a CD of popular Argentinian and Latin American music. Eventually, I recorded four CDs.

The most unexpected and important event though happened when the practitioner who used to be Rinpoche's translator (from English into Spanish) at Tashigar South didn't arrive on time. A replacement was needed, and I was chosen to occupy his place. I found the translation very natural and very musical. Rinpoche appreciated that his translators would not modify his teachings with their own interpretations, and would be able to adjust to a rhythm, slower or faster, without interrupting the flow of the Teachings. It was like having to empty myself of any other thought, just letting the words come out. With time it became easier, and I could find more accurate words or expressions. Then, as I continued translating our Master's teachings, I traveled with him to Chile, Peru, Tashigar North, Tsegyalgar West and México D.F. In those trips there were always many occasions to sing, and Rinpoche used to ask me to do so. I always kept those words in my heart, and sometimes, when I was singing, the consideration of inside and outside dissolved, and I felt that I was simply giving form to what was in the air. I also traveled a lot to teach courses as an Instructor of the Vajra Dance. That was a very happy period of my life, and from those experiences I started to write lyrics and the words began to flow more or less fluently, as I started to change from interpreter to composer.

Then, another happy event happened when I met the man who was going to be my husband – Gerardo Gandini – a famous composer very well known for his knowledge and sensitivity, and his particular way of composing music. He worked with musical materials from the history of music,



with methods and procedures belonging not only to Music composition but to Literature as well. Being with him and listening

spend time with my two daughters and my son, their partners and my five grandchildren, my loving family.

I consider myself an artist, but also a hard worker. Creativity is the base, but the knowledge and the procedures with which we shape the materials are very important, and they are reached with time and dedication. For me, the artistic practice is a combination of wisdom and feeling that allows something to manifest and take a sensitive form. Everything works better when I am present in the different experiences, the way we learned with our Master. As the material of my work is mainly voice and speech, it is important for me to release tensions in order to allow the creative and loving energy to flow, and be able to give this Music to those who are receptive to it.



2002 Vajra Dance Teacher Training in Tashigar North, Margarita (Nelida is in the center in a red dress).

to his lessons, I started to experiment with composition, working with materials of my own memory. I started to write music for my lyrics and developed skills and procedures to shape what was coming out in my evocations, my intuitions or my dreams.

At the present moment I am working on several projects about vocal experimental research and on a thesis about Latin American voices. I am also working on a recording project of my songs performed by different interpreters. One of my compositions has been recently incorporated into the repertoire of the Symphonic Orchestra "Tango sin fin" as result of a Music Composition award. Now I also like to

I am deeply grateful to our Master Chögyal Namkhai Norbu for everything that He gave us so generously. I feel that his Teachings changed my life and turned it to a full-time practice: in my work, with my family and with the Dzogchen Community. Also in society, making us able to lead what our indigenous people call "buen vivir" (harmonious life, *Sumak Kausay* in *Quechua*, *Nande Reko* in *Guarani*).

I hope that the Dzogchen Teachings shall spread over the Universe, especially in these difficult times when confusion and anger arise everywhere, so they can bring more wisdom and happiness and the end of samsara for all beings. ©

## History of the Minsk Dzogchen Community

Ruslan Malakhovskiy

For me it all began with my interest in philosophical questions about the nature of reality and consciousness. After getting acquainted with Western thinkers, I turned my attention to the East, and the first available thing was Krishnaism. I read Bhagavad-gita, then switched to the Upanishads, began to study Hindu Tantra and Kashmir Shaivism, and enthusiastically discovered Taoism and Zen. I became fascinated by the philosophy of Madhyamaka-Prasangika, and, of course, I couldn't miss the books of Carlos Castaneda. However, soon I understood that I was most attracted to Vajrayana Buddhism: it seemed to me more accessible and very appealing.

In the early 90s, there was almost no Buddhist literature in Minsk, Belarus. I used to go to the Lenin Library, the main library of the city, look there for books criticizing Buddhism-Lamaism, and try to find something useful in them.

During my short Krishnaism period I met a man who is now called Bhairavanananda Avadhuta. At that time he had a common name, and we often sat in the evenings in the kitchen, conducting philosophical conversations, studying books and meditating. Soon my school friend Alexey Danilov and several other people joined us. Thus the founding group that later became the Minsk Dzogchen Community came into being.

After that I met Buddhists from other cities: St. Petersburg, Vilnius, Kaunas. My friends and I used to visit them, borrow books on Buddhist philosophy, return home, photocopy them and take them back. At that time in Belarus, a photocopy was not cheap, and it was not as easy to make it as it is now. Then from these books we learned something.

In 1991, my friends and I decided to go to St. Petersburg and visit the Buddhist Datsan Gunzechoney on the Black River. There we met the abbot Samaev. This was the first lama I met in person. We waited for him for a long time in the reception room, and we were treated to some very



Rinpoche with the Belarus sangha in Vilnius in 1992.

old, almost wooden sweets with some tea. The abbot talked to us, found out who we were, gave us refuge, and we, joyful, travelled back to Minsk. In a sense, this was our first introduction to Buddhism.

In the summer of 1991, we went to Buryatia to meet with the Dalai Lama and to Vladivostok. For me it was also a honeymoon trip, since I had just got married. We went there with our entire community of eight people. First, we arrived in Ulan-Ude. The atmosphere was very strange there. For example, in the main square of the city there was a huge head of Lenin inside which a homeless person lived, and along the way we met some rather weird characters. We stayed in the city for some time and went to the Ivolginsky Datsan to attend the Dalai Lama's teachings.

Arriving at the Datsan, we found that although it looked like a decent pioneer camp instead of the pioneer heroes there were temple buildings where lamas in yellow and burgundy clothes passed back and forth. At that time our knowledge was bookish, and we had a poor idea of how the teaching is transmitted in the living tradition.

In those days, the Dalai Lama gave the Avalokiteshvara empowerment. This was our first initiation. The Dalai Lama surprised and fascinated us, he talked about difficult things in simple language. It was really great. He radiated warmth and joked a lot. At some point during the initiation,

a goat approached the place of teaching, an ordinary goat with a rope. At first people wanted to take him away, but the Dalai Lama said: «Leave the goat. He also came to hear the teaching. Who knows, maybe in the next life he will become human and will be a Rinpoche.

After that we went to Vladivostok. It was also a very interesting trip with a lot of adventures. We arrived at Hasan, the crossing point of three borders – Korea, China and Russia. After that, my wife and I separated from the group and went to the Aginsky Datsan in the Trans-Baikal Territory, where the Dalai Lama continued to teach.

Then we returned home and, inspired, began to practice. I made friends with Serafim Sidorov, who was involved in Tibetan medicine. He also used to help me get Buddhist books. I followed the Gelug tradition then because the Dalai Lama was from that tradition and I received teachings from him. I also used to go to St. Petersburg to attend a Gelug teacher Geshe Jampa Tinley's lectures and talk with St. Petersburg Buddhists.

Once Seraphim gave me a photocopy of Namkhai Norbu's book *The Crystal and the Way of Light*, and it was my first encounter with the Dzogchen teaching. I remember that I thought, "Wow, Dzogchen is great. But Gelug is also cool!" When I read this book, an extraordinary clarity arose in my mind about the primordial state, rigpa, the path.





Belarus practitioners travelling to Vladivostok, summer 1991.



Ruslan Malakhovskiy in Buryatia 1991.



Rinpoche in Vilnius in 1992.

This amazing book has played a significant role in my life. It was like a bolt of lightning that changed my perception of the world. It was a very unusual experience.

By that time there were already 12–15 of us and new folks appeared. We did practices meeting at somebody's apartment. We created a certain schedule, got together, prepared thematic lectures on Buddhism and did meditations based on the teachings that we received from the Dalai Lama. Then in 1992 it turned out that Namkhai Norbu was going to visit Moscow, St. Petersburg, Ulan-Ude, Riga and Vilnius to give teachings.

It was easiest to go to Vilnius because in those days we were tight with money. We went to a retreat, which was held near Vilnius in the Shilas health resort. Namkhai Norbu came there, taught Dzogchen, and there was such an impression that here it was, a live real lama. With the Dalai Lama, for example, there was a great distance. There were many people, about 1000 people at his teachings, and in Vilnius it was a rather small personal retreat, about 60 people, mostly Lithuanians.

We met different people there, including Jim Valby. He was absolutely charming and had also just met Rinpoche. We swam together in the lake, and he played the violin for us. Namkhai Norbu was close, we went for walks with him and asked him questions about things that worried us. It was a

very warm, human interaction. This made an absolutely lasting impression. Later, when we came to the big retreats, in this sense it was more difficult.

All experiences were fresh and powerful, and the practices of joint meditation were accompanied by vivid states of emptiness and clarity. Rinpoche, as always, gave a direct introduction to the Dzogchen teachings, some explanations and lungs of ritual practices. After this trip, the direction of our practice was finally determined.

At that time, we had financial difficulties, and we continued to gather at home: one time at one person's, the other time at another's. Then at some point we managed to find a place.

It was incredibly difficult to organize something in Belarus. The country was already reactionary in those years, and it was not easy to invite someone and do a retreat. Once we invited Adriana Dal Borgo for the Dance of the Vajra. Everything happened in winter in the Sosny quarters near Minsk. We managed to make a Mandala and rent a local school. The school was not heated and it was terribly cold. It was definitely an unusual experience for Adriana. We did our best, but I think it wasn't easy for her anyway.

We continued to study and practice Dzogchen. We did Guruyoga, practices on the special days, calendar Ganapujas – everything that is usual in the Dzogchen

Community. We practiced Yantra Yoga, made a Mandala and danced the Vajra Dance. Although we wanted to invite Namkhai Norbu to Minsk, due to his busy schedule and our limited possibilities, Rinpoche never visited us.

Nevertheless, in 1997 we managed to invite to Minsk the Bonpo teacher Nyima Dagpa Rinpoche, who also taught Dzogchen. We wanted to expand the community so that there were more people and the opportunity for renting premises arose again. We printed flyers inviting people to attend the teachings of a real Tibetan master, and covered the entire city with them. The government reaction was very negative and the local press accused us of inviting a fascist lama.

We rented a boarding house outside the city, but many obstacles arose. There was a terrible frost with wind and rain, the trees were broken, power lines were torn, and the electricity was cut off. Instead of the expected 100 people, 340 people came, because this was the first visit of a Bonpo master in the territory of the former USSR. Everything got out of hand. We couldn't feed the people because the kitchen was electric. We had to find another way. On the other hand, Nyima Dagpa Rinpoche gave excellent Dzogchen instructions. Many people came to us from the Moscow and St. Petersburg Dzogchen Communities. In

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# Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's First Retreat in Buryatia

Nick Dudka

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu first came to Buryatia in 1992. I was fortunate enough to be one of the organizers of that truly unique, amazing retreat. It took place near Lake Baikal, on the slightly smaller Kotokel lake, which is connected with Baikal by underground waters, and there were only 120 people present. Later, while attending other retreats, I saw how hundreds and thousands of people came to the great master, and was shocked by .....

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the end, despite all the obstacles, we were able to do it and it was a wonderful retreat.

Although we focused on Dzogchen practice, we went to retreats of other teachers such as Palden Sherab Rinpoche and Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche, Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche and other masters. For many years, when Namkhai Norbu came to Russia, we attended the Moscow retreats. Personally, Dzogchen fascinated me with its simplicity, clarity and essence compared to the deep, but very extensive Tantric teachings.

In 1994, Namkhai Norbu gave our community the name Jigdreling (Place Beyond Fear). Probably because despite the fact that we were born in a country where there was no Dharma before and the government of the country is still very negatively disposed towards any teachings except Christianity, we managed to create a Dzogchen Community and establish regular practice.

In 1999 I emigrated to America, and people still continue to gather in Minsk and practice, but that's another story. ©



Ganapuja during the retreat in Buryatia, 1992.

All photos by Igor Ustyuzhanin

the privacy, in a sense, the intimacy of that first retreat in Buryatia.

The background to this retreat is very old. My personal interest in Buddhism arose around the mid-80s, when I, an artist, a seeker of oriental images, returned to Buryatia from Ukraine and met my first spiritual teacher, Dharma Dodi Lama. He

in Conway. At that time, samizdat was highly regarded. There were almost no copiers, and people made photocopies of books, arranging through acquaintances in offices or factories. It was impossible to read it, because each subsequent copy lost its print quality and I already had the 8th or 10th copy of that book.



People at the Buryat retreat: Serafim Sidorov and Farida Malikova.

was a Gelug teacher with an absolutely amazing biography, who served 14 years in Stalin's camps. He gave initiations, some instructions, and by about the end of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s, I had a completely vague, abstract idea of Buddhism, the path, methods and practice. All this was fragmentary, very vague and seemed completely unreal for this life.

In the late 1980s, I came across a samizdat (underground press in Soviet times – ed.) book by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, *Talks*

*Talks in Conway* made a strong impression on me, putting in order the previous 5–6 years of practice. A few words of Rinpoche revealed such clarity in my mind that it became distinct where to move, how to move on this path and what the path itself is. I realized that this is the teacher I would like to see.

By that time, I was already intensively studying the Tibetan language, and I really wanted to talk with Tibetans, receive teachings in Tibetan, etc. At that time it





Rinpoche giving teaching.

was unthinkable: there were neither books nor Internet. But after reading *Talks in Conway*, I realized that in order to communicate with this teacher, I would not need Tibetan, but English. I gave up Tibetan for a while and began to study English intensively in order to meet Rinpoche.

By 1990, we had already formed a group of fellow-thinkers who wanted to meet Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche. There were 3–5 of us, and we tried in every possible way to find at least some material related to the

me booklets, brochures, books – something in English, something in Italian. It was remarkable.

My very close friend Volodya Bardakov and I – now he is a wonderful doctor of Tibetan medicine in Kharkov, Ukraine, and then, fortunately, he lived here in Buryatia – did some personal retreats, having no transmission, no initiation, no knowledge, and no understanding, just a passionate desire to develop in this direction and move along this path.

would find a winter hunting cabin and do retreats there for a week or 10 days. I don't remember exactly, but maybe we did three or four such retreats. We had no shadow of doubt, no feeling that we were doing something wrong. We read brochures in which Rinpoche explained everything clearly, and if there was something unclear, we turned to our Bible, *Talks in Conway*.

In 1991, there was a rumor that Fabio Andrico was coming to St. Petersburg, for the first time on the territory of the former Soviet Union. We already knew who Fabio was and what he taught. Of course, I rushed there with great pleasure and took part in that retreat. We had a wonderful translator, Lena, we did Yantra Yoga and Fabio joked a lot.

When we learned that Rinpoche was going to visit us soon, we began to prepare. It was the summer of 1992. About 100 people came to that retreat from all over the former Soviet Union. Also, about 20 foreigners arrived, including Annalen Gull, Andy Lukianowicz, John Shane, Jean Macintosh, Naomi Zeitz, etc., with whom we immediately found a common language, as if we were not seeing each other for the first time. It was an absolutely amazing retreat.

Irkutsk photographer Igor Ustyuzhanin made many beautiful photographs that very well conveyed the atmosphere, the time and state of Rinpoche. Rinpoche could be reached with a hand and he did not leave a single question unanswered. He saw your every glance and preceded your question with a ready-made answer. Then I, of course, became enraptured. Something

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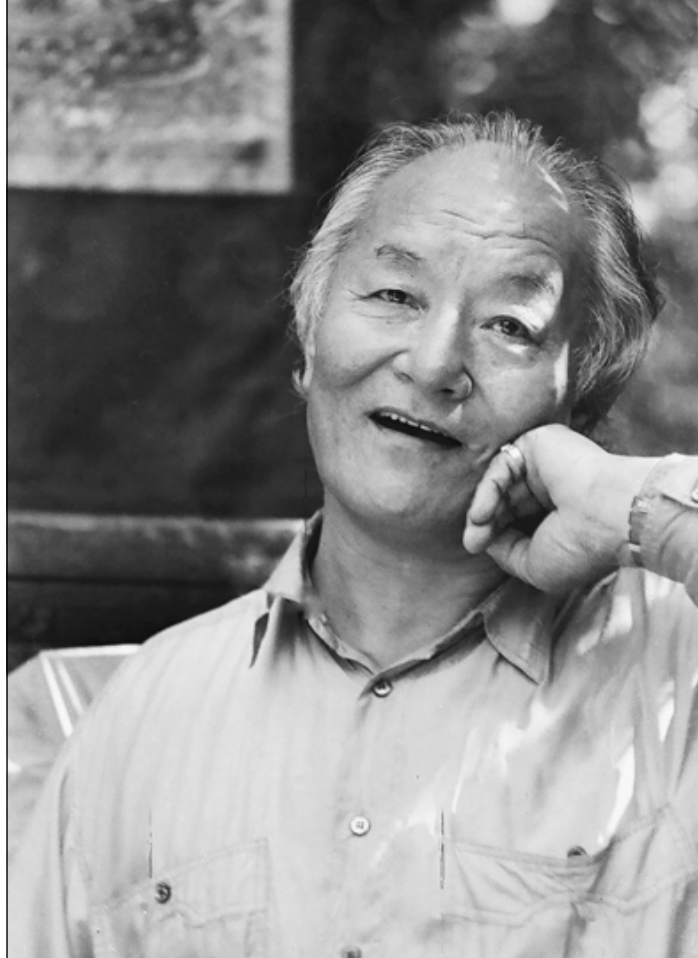


People at the Buryat retreat. Batodalai Dugarov in the front, Nick Dudka behind him.

Dzogchen teachings and Rinpoche's lineage.

Due to my natural activity, I started writing to Merigar. At that time, I could already write something crooked and clumsy in English. I asked how one could get teachings and some literature. Merigar responded with great joy and began to send

At that time, Volodya lived in a small village 300 km from Ulan-Ude. Even now it is not so easy to get there, but then it was almost impossible. Nevertheless, I would come to him in the village, then we would walk together into the taiga [boreal or snow forest – ed.]. He knew those places, we



poche opened it, took a glass that came to hand, and began to do Serkyem, performing several times, as I later understood, its last part. Rinpoche spoke words quickly, poured champagne and sprinkled behind him. Then he happily put down the glass with the words: "I've done everything, I've



Rinpoche showing how to play drums in the practice of the Guardians.

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for what I had been preparing for all these years switched on.

I often remember that first retreat and the experiences that happened there. During the first 4–5 days of the retreat, there was the summer heat, the sun was blazing and some people fainted. For us local people, it was customary, but for visitors it was hot. Rinpoche was like an unyielding lion, like the sun. And the sun cannot burn the sun, so he felt great.

On the last day of the retreat, the sky was suddenly covered with leaden clouds. They hung directly over us, touching the trees, and threatened to rain down. The retreat took place in the open air on a small dance floor that could accommodate everyone and there was still room, and there was no umbrella or awning in case of rain.

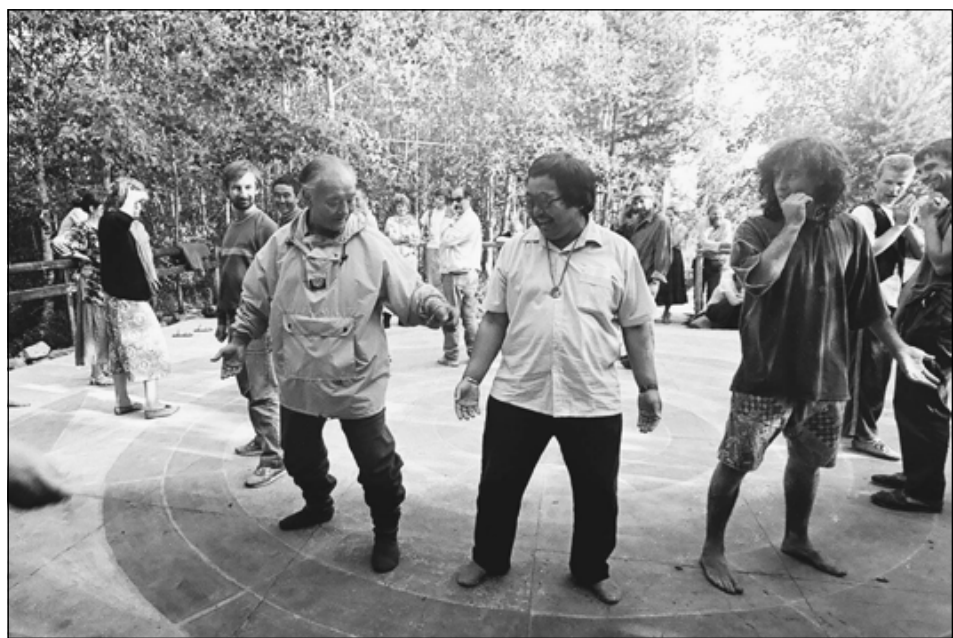
When we do the practice of Ganapuja, in Buryatia it is not customary to just offer a piece of meat and drink a sip of wine. We prepare huge fifty-liter cauldrons with meat – lamb, beef, broth – and vats of alcohol for a sumptuous feast.

I was sitting near Rinpoche because I was recording the retreat on a cassette recorder. Rinpoche gave *luns* as usual, after which we had to do a Ganapuja and say goodbye. Meanwhile, the clouds thickened

and thickened, and the first drops of rain fell. The organizers, who were taking care of the Ganapuja, began to glance at the sky,

done everything, I've done everything," and he began to whistle something.

Immediately, raising my eyes to the sky, I saw how the thunderous, swollen clouds, like a curtain in a theater, instantly flew to the sides, and above there were ordinary clouds that did not carry rain but graciously provided a covering from the sun. After that we did an amazing Ganapuja, natural-



Rinpoche showing steps of Vajra Dance.

realizing that if it rained, our entire luxurious banquet would be spoiled.

Then Rinpoche quietly said to Fabio in Italian, "Give me some wine." Fabio handed Rinpoche a bottle of champagne. Rin-

ly, we ate all the vats of meat, drank everything that was meant to be drunk, and at the end of the Ganapuja everyone was in a blissful and peaceful mood. Rinpoche was pleased and laughed, it was clear that he



was very happy, like all of us. He, as usual, said goodbye to everyone. At that moment, I raised my head, since Rinpoche was sitting higher on the throne, and a large raindrop fell on me exactly in the place of the third eye. I took it as a good sign.

When we, joyful and benevolent, boarded the buses and began to share our impressions, it turned out that a raindrop fell on almost everyone's head. Then I realized that this was the teacher's blessing. During the retreat, the teacher managed to offer so much knowledge, information and faith to the students, and everyone took something of their own. I'm sure none of the 120 people who were there have left the Community. Some are already, unfortunately, no longer alive, but all the rest have continued to follow the teachings.

At the end of that retreat, Rinpoche invited me to paint the Merigar Gönpa, and in April 1993 I went to Italy. There were several teams: one was engaged in external painting, the other painted the walls in the directions of the cardinal points. We painted flowers, decorations and mantras over the front doors, but the whole design was, of course, done by Rinpoche himself. Later, another team painted the columns and a Tibetan couple painted the lineages of the transmission of teachings – Nyingma, Gelug, and so on – on the walls.

to mix paints, etc. During that time, I became very close to him, and on the wall with the twelve Tonpas that he painted, I helped him draw one Tonpa that emerged from the egg.

Now, after so many years that I am with a teacher, in the teaching and engaged in Tibetan painting, I can say that for me Rinpoche seems to be the sun, which is always present in the sky, regardless of whether it is cloudy or not, night outside or day. It is happiness to be able to meet such a great master in this life, receive the Teaching and carry its transmission within oneself. Like the fire of the sun, it will never go out, and it depends on us, Rinpoche's disciples, who continue his lineage, his Teachings.

Therefore, I try to follow Rinpoche's teachings and be useful, living here in Buryatia, in Russia, on planet Earth, doing something for others. Since I studied as an artist, first doing European painting, and then Buddhist thangka painting, I try to spread this in every possible way both within the community and outside.

In 2020, while everyone was sitting at home during the pandemic, I published several books to show the art of thangka so that people can move, like on a bridge, to the spiritual path. One of them is *Dzogchen – Path of Thangka*, also a huge album *Thangka – Art of Meditation, Philosophy*

Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow.

The inspiration for all my activities is the Teacher. Every day of my life I wake up with the thought of the Teacher and fall asleep with the thought of him. Because he, like the sun, inspires, warms, awakens everything to life. After all, without the sun there would be no life and the sprout would not grow. Observing and communicating with him for over 30 years, I saw how compassionate he was with people, how he tried to help people in different ways. It is very important for me.

Now, when there are chitchats in the community about his successor and the continuation of the Teachings, it seems to me that each of Rinpoche's disciples is a successor, each of Rinpoche's disciples is a continuer and carries the Teachings of a great Teacher. This light depends on each of us. If we continue this Teaching and carry the fire of this sun within us, then this fire will shine on everyone until awakening. ©

**Editor's note:** This historic retreat was organised by a group of practitioners, including Batodalai Dugarov, Nick Dudka and students of the well-known Buryat author and teacher Bidia Dandaron.



Rinpoche showing Vajra Dance movements. On Rinpoche's left is Batodalai Dugarov.

When I was working on the painting, at the same time the amazing artist Drugu Choegyal Rinpoche was invited to Merigar. I bombarded him with questions about how to stretch and prime the canvas, how

and Yoga and several other books. I am happy that His Holiness the Dalai Lama himself wrote the foreword to the album. And this autumn I plan to start a thangka painting course at the Institute of Oriental

# How I Met Chögyal Namkhai Norbu

Pancho Company

“Who is the Chinese man in the photo with your son?” I asked Marc. “He is my Master”, he replied. “Master of what?”, I insisted.

“Master of life,” he answered me smiling and without going into more detail. That was the first image I saw of Rinpoche, the photo was on the table behind my drum set. We used to play music at the Eagleton’s house in Altea, Alicante, Spain.

I was born in Alicante but I grew up in Madrid. At seventeen I became a musician, a drummer, and at nineteen I got married. 1975 was a year of great changes, Spain was effervescent and in search of freedom and answers. In 1976 my wife and I (with our two children) left Madrid and settled in Altea, a beautiful Mediterranean town; we believed it was a better place to see them grow up. I have always thought that the life change was a success.

In Altea we get together a good number of artists, painters, sculptors, philosophers, musicians, actors, dancers, intellectuals and hippies in general, with the common goal of wanting to change the world by transgressing the limits of conventional society. Nice dream.

One morning Richard Eagleton came to our house. He told me that he was a musician like his brother Marc and that a mutual friend had recommended that they connect with me. Thus began a relationship in which music was the guiding thread of the purest fusion of harmony and energy, we could be playing for hours improvising, creating and developing the songs from the heart and to infinity, it was something really fantastic, pure, very different from what I lived in my professional life, music beyond concepts.

From time to time they went on a trip to some exotic place, like Lapland. Next week we are going to a retreat, they said, to a place where the sun does not set at this time of summer, it is always daytime. For my Catholic education a retreat was something like recollection, silence, praying, making fasts, sacrifices and so on, but they told me that in their retreats there were many people from all over the world, “There are many girls!”



This was the first image I saw of Rinpoche that was behind my drum set.

All this sounded like Chinese to me but I respected them because they manifested themselves in an impeccable, exquisite way.

In my “search for truth” I had gone through Bakunin, Hesse, Castaneda and... Gurdjieff my favorite, and my closest approach to Buddhism was Lobsang Rampa, that is, I am not very intellectual.

A few years later, my Eagleton brothers went to live in Seggiano, in the Italian

visit myself to attend to their repeated invitations.

Finally in 1990 I was able to organize a trip that I scheduled for May.

“If you can, it would be interesting if you came on May 1 because there is going to be a special event”, Richard told me.

“What event?”, I asked.

“We are going to have a visit from the Dalai Lama.”

“Ok, I’ll be there.”



Today the Vajra Dance is my main practice.

Tuscany. Our musical relationship became lethargic, limiting itself to the occasions when they came to Altea on vacation and always with the commitment to return the

On May 1, 1990 I arrived in Merigar for the first time, the expectation was unheard of, I think I remember that His Holiness arrived by helicopter, there were many Bud-





I requested and received permission directly from Rinpoche to attend the first Longsal Retreat in Tashigar North.

dhist monks, military or Carabinieri, many people, the Gönpa (which was going to be inaugurated) was at overflowing, there was a large screen outside with many chairs so that those who did not fit inside could follow the activities. We got a place inside the Gönpa and I could see His Holiness's arrival up close. Everything was very exciting, interesting, but what struck me the most was when Rinpoche entered and everyone stood up and there was that silence, a show of respect and devotion. That impression that I had when I saw Rinpoche for the first time is something that has remained inside me indelibly, not in my memory but in my whole being, body, voice and mind. The next day there was a kind of picnic (it really was a Ganapuja but I didn't know it) and I had the opportunity to share a few hours with the Master and the Sangha, we ate, drank and, of course, we sang.

In September I returned to Merigar to attend my first retreat. I traveled from Rome with Paolo Brunatto and his wife Pupe. Paolo spoke Spanish and since he liked to do it, he offered to translate for me from Rinpoche, who then taught in Italian and was translated into English. After ten minutes I said to Paolo, "Thank you but you don't need to make an effort because I understand His words quite well, if I don't understand something I'll ask you." The Tibetan words, such as Dharmakaya, etc., had me confused but the Italian ones I understood from the first moment as well as the essence of their deep meaning and I immediately perceived how the knowledge was transmitted to each of us as the mother bird feeds her chicks by giving them the food they can digest.

There was Teaching in the morning and in the afternoon. In those days Rinpoche began to teach The Dance of the Vajra and sometimes, after the afternoon session, we went to Cappanone where I had the opportunity to take my first steps in the Mandala. Today Vajra Dance is my main practice.

How fortunate we are that we have had the possibility to drink the pure water of knowledge directly from the Source of Wisdom!!!

Thank you my Dear Master.





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