



THE MIRROR

No. 159
March 2023

The Real Meaning of Integration
Tibetan Ox Divination for the New Year
A Conversation With Nina Robinson
Open Letter – Lettera Aperta



INTERNATIONAL
DZOGCHEN
COMMUNITY

Contents

Editorial	3
The Real Meaning of Integration.	4
International Gakyil	7
Tibetan Ox Divination for the New Year	8
Shang Shung Institute	11
“Alendar” in the Sangha App	14
ASIA	15
Dance from Tibetan Dances and Cosmic Education.	16
Dzamling Gar	17
Merigar West	25
Merigar East	29
Kunsangar North	30
Tashigar North	31
Tashigar South	32
Pictures from the Past	34
Reflections	38
Passages	39
Healers in the Dzogchen Community	42
A Conversation With Nina Robinson	44
Open Letter – Lettera Aperta	47

Editorial

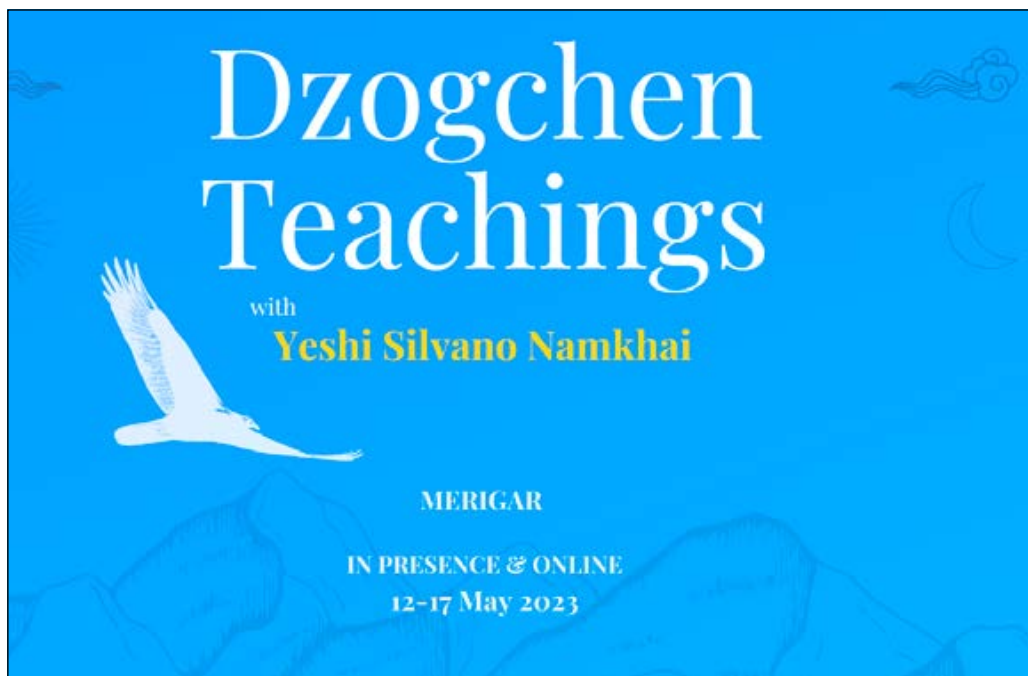
To all our readers far and wide across the globe we extend our warmest wishes on the occasion of the new Tibetan Water Rabbit year that began on Losar, the 1st day of the Fire Dragon month, February 21, 2023.

A new year, whenever it begins, whatever its origins, whether it is our Western Gregorian calendar or an Oriental lunar one, is a momentous event that we celebrate for the opportunities and possibilities that a new beginning may bring. At the same time, as a marker in time it invites us to reflect on the new years of the past and the many events that take place year after year. As the editorial team of The Mirror, this new year is another significant marker in time since it was first published as a newspaper in 1990 at Merigar in Italy.

Looking back to that year at Merigar, when the first Gar had become an example and a focal point for the other young Dzogchen Community Gars, it was Asem, our Egyptian vajra brother, who proposed to Rinpoche the creation of a printed newspaper that would become a tool for communication within the worldwide Community. It was Asem's initiative, experience and commitment, combined with the skills of many others, to bring to life the first issues of The Mirror, printed in newspaper format and mailed out from the local post office in Arcidosso. It is to Asem and his recent passing that we dedicate some space in this issue to remember his energy and perseverance in bringing The Mirror to life.

Time has moved on from those early and somewhat primitive beginnings in 1990, when the news was often handwritten and sent by post, or at the most by fax, to our office in the Merigar capannone. Year after year the many people involved in publishing The Mirror have strived to sustain the enthusiasm with which The Mirror was founded and, at the same time, aspired to present it through various modern communication tools.

Today, more than 30 years on, the printed newspaper has branched out in various directions; it is still printed, but in a handier magazine format, and quarterly, side by side with our websites, in English, Italian and Russian which publish Dzogchen Community news and articles every day. In keeping with the times we are also visible on Facebook social media and our English and Russian Telegram channels. And we



are still working to fulfill the root mission of The Mirror to serve as a communication tool between the many cultures and languages within our worldwide Vajra Family.

To celebrate the current Tibetan New Year, we are very happy to publish Dr. Phuntsog's recent explanation of a traditional Tibetan prediction for the year, the Ox Divination, to give an idea of the tendencies and the obstacles for the present year. Through the retelling of an old Buddhist tale, The Four Friends, she also reminds us of the importance of the relationships of respect and support in our Sangha, our society, and our globe.

With this new year of the Water Hare, we can also look towards the future with a much awaited event to be held at Merigar in May. Yeshe Silvano Namkhai has generously offered to give several days of Dzogchen Teachings there. It promises to be a moment of opening beyond limits when long-time students of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, students of his son, Yeshe Namkhai, and newcomers can meet and join together to listen to his words.

The Water Hare holds many promises and, of course, some surprises, but without doubt it will be a special year, a momentous year, as we look forward to this historic occasion for our Sangha worldwide. ©

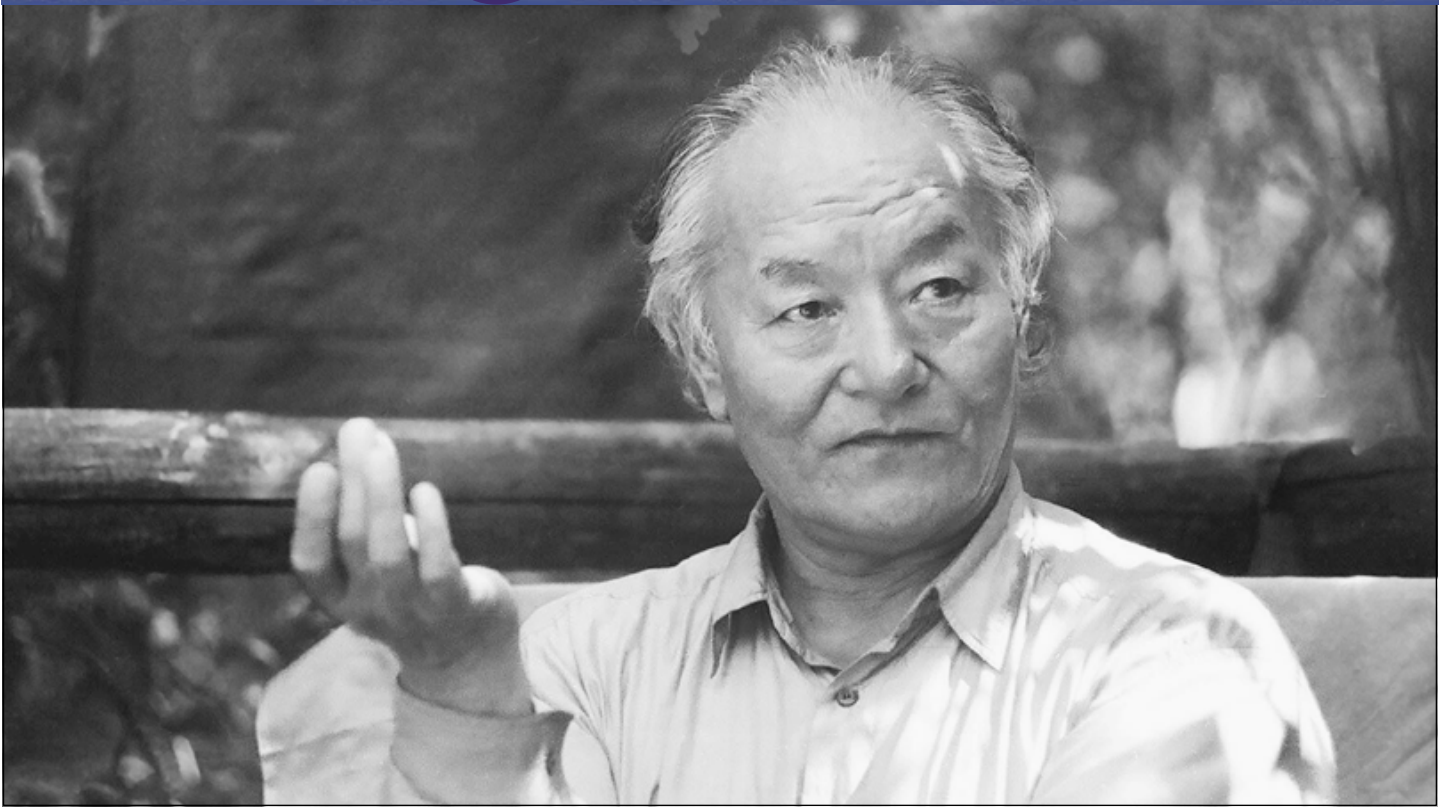


Photo by Igor Ustyzhnin

The Real Meaning of Integration

In the Dzogchen teaching, if you are in any kind of place and at that moment, you are in a state of *rigpa*, then that is your place, your sacred or holy place. In general people want to go to a holy place such as a temple to do practice. But when you are in instant presence, then wherever you are becomes a holy place, your temple.

This teaching was transcribed from a private recording made by Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche for *The Mirror* during his tour of Russia and Buryatia in 1992.

First published in *The Mirror* issue 16, July/August 1992.

We use the term “integration” widely in the Dzogchen teaching, but its real meaning is that first of all a Dzogchen practitioner should be in the state of Dzogchen which means his real condition. To be in the real condition you must discover it, and then you have knowledge of it. If you have experience or knowledge of the state which, in the Dzogchen teach-

ing, we call the state of *rigpa* or the state of contemplation, then you have a possibility to integrate your contemplation into the circumstances of your normal condition or your normal condition integrates in the state of contemplation.

Of course, when we reason with our intellect, integrating all our circumstances of normal life in a state of contemplation or integrating our capacity of contemplation in the relative condition, these seem to be two different aspects. But when you are in your real nature or condition there is no difference between them.

Namkha arted

How can you learn to integrate that knowledge? In the Dzogchen teaching there is a very famous practice called *namkha arted* (*nam mkha ar gted*). *Namkha* means space. *Arted* means you are gazing into space and at the same time you are that empty space. In your condition you have emptiness or inner space. At the same time you have outer space outside yourself. So when you gaze into empty space in the sky that means that you are gazing into outer space. Your presence is in empty space, that means that you are also in your inner space. There is no difference between inner and outer space if you are in the state of *rigpa* and you can have that experience when you do the practice of *namkha arted*.

Clarity

It is the same principle when you are in a state of contemplation. For example, you open your eyes and you can see objects. They could have a pleasant or unpleasant colour or form. It doesn't matter. In any case you can see objects clearly and you notice their colour or shape. Before you start to enter into judgement, whatever



er you see is part of your clarity. But even when you receive that information through your mind if you are aware that you are in a state of instant presence, you are not distracted by it. At that moment some thoughts may arise. There can be a continuation of thoughts but you are not distracted by them. You are aware. Also in this case, what you see continues to be part of your clarity.

Distraction

Of course if you are distracted by thoughts and there is no continuation of your instant presence, then you cannot say that it is your clarity, because you are ignoring the real nature of clarity with your distraction and your concepts, because at that moment you are judging whether something is good or bad. If you have the idea that something is good then you also have the idea of accepting it. If you have the idea that something is bad then you have the concept of rejection. In Tibetan they are called *chag* (*chags*) and *dang* (*sdang*). *Chag* means attachment and *dang* means anger.

In all our sense contacts with objects we have that kind of instant clarity and if we have, at that moment, our instant presence and the continuation of it, all sense contacts become part of our clarity. But in general, we are distracted by them and there is no more function of clarity. So when we say that we are in the state of integration it means that we are continually in instant presence. If we are in instant presence then there is no more consideration or concept of subject and object and there is no ordinary attachment and anger. That means as a consequence that there is nothing to accept or reject. Of course if you do not have the concept of accepting or rejecting then you do not have the possibility to produce negative karma. So that is the real meaning of integration.

Self-liberation

You can only discover what integration really means when you are in the state of contemplation or rigpa. For example, if you hear a sound, it may be pleasant or horrible. When you are distracted by the sound, then if it is pleasant you develop an attachment to it whereas if it is horrible then you reject it. In this way you produce karma and enter into action. If you feel that a sound is horrible and that you don't like it, you have that concept then you also have its tensions which you accumulate day after day. For example, if you hear a horrible sound today, you will feel it is much more horrible tomorrow because you get charged up and develop your tension. Tensions are continually developing. In the end, if you cannot eliminate that sound then you will start to struggle with it. In this way tension becomes even greater.

But if you integrate with a sound, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant, it doesn't matter, it means that you are in that clarity, in the real nature of sound. The sound is not something outside you that gives you a terrible feeling and you are not somewhere else receiving a bad sound. But if you are the sound, if you are present in the sound, there is no question of thinking or feeling that it is good or bad. In the nature of sound there is no good or bad aspect. Sound is only sound. So when you are in the state of contemplation and at the same time you are a sound and you are in integration, you cannot have any kind of tension. You automatically liberate that problem. That is the principle of self-liberation. You are not

transforming a sound into something else. For example, you are not transforming bad sound into good and then enjoying it. But you are that sound and that is very different. So that is the principle of integration.

Dualism

We have five senses and, if we include our mind, they are six. In the same way we have six sense organs and the objects of the senses. When we have sense contact with objects, we do not remain in the dualistic condition but in instant presence without consideration of subject and object, in the real condition. This is the real meaning of integration. You have no more to discover. In the Dzogchen teaching we say that "when you discover one, then you discover all". It means that when you discover this instant presence or the state of rigpa or contemplation, you discover the whole universe, all your consideration of subject and object in integration. If you have that experience, that principle, then there are many possibilities.

We are human beings living in the relative condition. This means that all human beings have human karmic vision which is produced by collective karma. We have this collective karma because we have the same emotions and through these emotions we produce the same karma. Through that kind of karma we have the consequences of the same karmic vision which is the human condition. In our human vision and human dimension we consider things to be very real and concrete and important. We feel this way because we are humans, and this is a condition of human beings and their circumstances – everything is real and concrete. So that means that we are living in dualistic vision with subject and object.

Relative condition

Of course it is not so easy for a practitioner to be directly and continually in a state of contemplation from the beginning. In the relative condition we have a physical body and also the limitations of our energy and mind. In order to maintain our physical body, we need material elements: when we are hungry we need food and when we are thirsty we need to drink. All these things are very concrete for the karmic vision of a human being. But if you have knowledge of integration, then there is a way to relax without developing tensions and through this there is a possibility to integrate everything in the practice, in that knowledge.

If you remain too much in your consideration of subject and object, good and bad, developing your concept that there is something to accept or reject, then, of course, tensions will develop day after day and there will be no possibility to be in the state of integration. If you have knowledge of integration, then there is something to learn, to develop that capacity. So one of the most important principles of the teaching is our real knowledge. It is not a principle which relates to something external.

Attachment

When the great master Tilopa gave advice to his disciple, the Mahasiddha Naropa, he said to him, "The problem is not impure visions but our attachment (to them)". This is an example.

» continued on the following page



» continued from previous page

If you have attachment, then you have consideration of subject and object, good and bad, pure and impure and you remain in this concept and you apply it rejecting or accepting. If you know that the problem is within yourself, in your attachment, then that means that the problem is not external and if you know that the problem is your attachment then you remember that attachment is the consequence of our judgement. Judgement arises through our sense contact with objects.

Take for example our mind. The object of our mind is all dharma, all phenomena. So we think, we judge, we consider something is good or bad. If we consider something to be good we immediately consider why it is good and we try to make a justification. When we arrive at our justification then we consider that to be logical, something real. In this way we are distracted and we create attachment or anger and we are continually walking with attachment and anger as if they were two legs. In this way we go ahead in infinite samsara. If we discover that this principle is linked with our distraction, if we are not distracted and remain present in our real knowledge, our real condition, then we are in a state of integration and there is nothing wrong. In the Dzogchen teaching, that is called the principle of Samantabhadra, Kuntuzangpo (*Kun tu bzang po*). *Kuntu* means all, forever, *zangpo* means fine.

Everything is fine and there is nothing which has no value and which you have to reject. Of course, if you have nothing to reject, then you have nothing to accept. Everything is fine. You can understand that everything is fine when you really get into the state of integration.

In Tibetan we say *ying rig yermed* (*bying rig dbyer med*). *Ying* means *dharmadhatu*. *Dhatu* means the real condition of all phenomena which is emptiness. In the Dzogchen teaching we say *kadag* (*ka dag*). *Kadag* means pure from the very beginning, the pure dimension of emptiness. *Rig* means instant presence, *Rigpa*. If you are only in emptiness, that is only part of your experience, but it is not the state of rigpa. Being in the state of instant presence in emptiness, that is the state of rigpa. But then you discover, while you are in a state of instant presence, that it is non-dual. You cannot distinguish or separate emptiness from instant presence. This is called *yermed*, non-dual. *Ying rig yermed*, non-dual, the state of ying and rigpa. When we have that knowledge and enter into it, then we say *ying rig dre* (*bying rig 'dres*). *Dre* is a verb and it means to integrate. In this case it means the dimension of emptiness is integrated in the state of rigpa. Or the state of rigpa is integrated in emptiness. So it is non-dual.

As it is

In the same way we can integrate our behaviour, our relative condition, everything. In the Dzogchen teaching, if you are in any kind of place and at that moment, you are in a state of rigpa, then that is your place, your sacred or holy place. In general people want to go to a holy place such as a temple to do practice. But when you are in instant presence, then wherever you are becomes a holy place, your temple.

In the Dzogchen upadesha, the word *chogshag* (*cog bzhag*) is explained. *Chogshag* means remaining in the state as it is. That

means that if you are lying down on your bed and you are in instant presence, in the state of rigpa, that is fine. If you are in a temple with a wonderful atmosphere, sitting in a correct position, in the state of rigpa, then that is fine, too. Or perhaps you are driving a car through the confusion of a city, but at that moment you are in a state of contemplation, then that is fine. There is not much difference between driving a car, lying on the bed or being in a temple. It is all *kuntuzangpo*.

So it not necessary to reject something like the place you are in and try to get to a more interesting place, or reject your consideration of your worldly situation and take refuge in a nice quiet place or a monastery. This is not the principle. The principle is being in your knowledge and being able to integrate.

Giving value

There is a saying of Milarepa, "All movements such as walking and doing things, everything is yantra yoga". If a practitioner, a yogi, is in the principle of yoga, or knowledge, or understanding, that means that he can integrate everything in his normal condition. Of course, sometimes we need a quiet place for a short time such as a week or a month, or even three months in order to do practices like *rushen* (*ru shan*), *shine* (*zhi gnas*), *semdzin* (*sems 'dzin*) or *zernga* (*gzer lnga*). All these are very important practices for experiencing with our emotions and understanding the difference between mind and the nature of mind. Also to experience the state of rigpa. They are important when you start the practice of Dzogchen so that you can enter into the real nature of the teaching. Or if someone has already had experience of these then they can start to realize them. But this doesn't mean that the principle of the practice is only finding refuge somewhere and escaping from the ordinary world. The principle is to learn to integrate and to give value to every thing which is related to our normal condition.

Daily life

So if you are really a good practitioner of Dzogchen, it is not necessary that you manifest that you reject or accept or change something. Today there are many people who have this kind of attitude. They are trying to show something. But the principle of the teaching is not for showing something or making an exhibition but automatically manifesting your realization through your behaviour, your daily life. For example, if you are a good practitioner, then you automatically manifest that you have less tensions because you have the capacity to integrate. If you have some problems, you don't feel that they are really heavy because you do not have the consideration that they are something very important. There is always the possibility to integrate.

There is a saying in a tantra of the upadesha, "Fire cannot burn fire, and the air element cannot destroy itself". This means that if you are in your real nature, there is no problem. When you are in that integration, then that is called realization. So you must understand what is the real meaning of integration that way.



Principle of integration

Many people have the idea that integration means mixing something. Some people want to integrate different methods and then they make a kind of mixture. Somebody asked me if they could integrate some methods of teachings that are not Dzogchen with the Dzogchen teaching. I always say that if you know what the real meaning of integration is, you can integrate everything, not only some methods, Buddhist or other. It doesn't matter. But you can integrate everything in the relative condition, the whole universe. There is no limitation. But if you don't understand what integration means, then you only create a kind of confusion, putting two different things together and creating a mixture or transforming them considering this to be integration. This is not the real meaning of integration. It means you are changing things or creating problems.

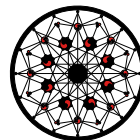
For example, if you are learning a method, it has its principle so you must learn and use that method in a precise way. If you change, transform or modify that method, it will no longer have its function. If you are using any kind of tantric method, you must use the correct form and colour for the visualization. Everything is a fixed symbol since the method was first transmitted and you can never change even the smallest part of that. If you change something at this point, it doesn't mean that you are integrating.

Some people say that they are Westerners and that they use five angels instead of the five Dhyani Buddhas. They consider that they are integrating because this is Western knowledge or culture. But this isn't so. They are changing a tantric method and if you

change this then there is no transmission. These people are only inventing in an intellectual way. That is not teaching. Teaching has always had its transmission since the very beginning which must be continued in a pure way. Integrating means being in that true sense. In that case, if you want to use five angels, you can use five Christian angels but in a Christian practice. It doesn't mean you can't use Christian practice in Dzogchen. There are no limitations. But then you must use these symbols as they are taught in the Christian tradition without changing or transforming. This is integration. You can integrate everything, but in the correct way, maintaining the principle of knowledge and integration from the very beginning.

Rigpa

If you understand integration in that way then it has sense and there is also something for you to do with the real meaning of this word; and you can understand that integration is the state of contemplation. In Dzogchen when we are in a state of contemplation we say that we are in a state of total integration or in a totally relaxed state. This means that when you are in a state of rigpa, this represents total integration. If there is not total integration in that state, even if you are using the word "integration", you cannot understand what it means, in the same way even if you consider that you are relaxed, if you don't discover and find yourself in your real nature, even if you are using this word, you are not in a state of total relaxation. *



2023 IDC Membership Appeal!

Dear Global Vajra Family,
The Year of the Water Hare has arrived. We hope it may be gentler and auspicious, allow peace to prevail worldwide, and bring the best of health and good fortune to all!

The Year of the Water Hare also brings a new opportunity to renew your membership in 2023.

Membership is one of the most important ways we demonstrate our commitment to the teachings and to supporting the International Dzogchen Community, its Gars and Lings, and Sangha.

The International Gakyil sends a warm thank you to those of you who have already updated 2023 membership as of March 2023, and a reminder to those of you that have yet to do so.

Renewing your 2023 membership is easy. Visit dzogchen.net to view and choose the payment methods for your local Gar or Ling. Many of them offer the opportunity to renew membership directly online through your personal profile at <https://dzogchen.net/profile/membership/>.

Alternatively, you can contact your local Gar or Ling directly, which is the Gar or Ling closest to your geographical area of residence.

We look forward to the renewal of your membership in 2023, and we also remind you that you have the opportunity to retroactively make a payment for any previous membership years you may have missed – specifically 2020, 2021, and 2022 – as needed!

With love,
The International Gakyil & International Membership Coordinator
Miranda, Barbara, Gabriella, Vince, and Marija ©

Tibetan Ox Divination for the New Year

On the eve of Losar, during her stay at Tashigar Sur, Argentina, Dr. Phuntsog Wangmo, director of the Tibetan Medicine School, gave a talk about the aspects of the new Tibetan Water Rabbit year and the importance of the Buddhist story of the Four Friends.

The Year of the Water Rabbit

Losar is the name of the Tibetan new year. The new year is very important in every culture because on that day families and communities reunite and present the customs connected to their culture - dancing, singing, preparing certain food, wearing certain clothes and ornaments. Therefore Losar is an important moment to re-introduce our culture to the younger generation. Today, although we often buy things that are ready made, there is still a sense of family if we make certain things. This also gives the sense of our roots, which is very important.

This new year is the year of the Water Rabbit. In general, the rabbit is a pleasant animal. It is clever, talented, sometimes so clever that it may be deceptive. The rabbit has many different sides to its character: it can be really truthful, but sometimes acts according to the circumstances. While it is humble, kind and gentle, if the rabbit wants to do something, it has the capacity to attack, although it normally doesn't.

Since the rabbit is very clever, people who are born in the year of the Rabbit normally become scholars, writers, doctors, involved in any kind of work related to studying. The element of this year, Water, goes well for the Rabbit year. In general, the birth element of the Rabbit is Wood. Water is the mother element of Wood - if we don't give water to wood, it cannot grow - so these elements have a favorable combination and relatively this year is quite good. Water is also a source of life. It is cohesive, gentle, soft, but also very determined. At times Water can be much stronger than weapons. A few weeks ago we saw this when flooding destroyed the roads. Water has the capacity to be very forceful. We usually consider Fire to be aggressive, but when necessary, Water is also quite aggressive, rapid, and active. So in general



Dr. Phuntsog Wangmo.

this Water Rabbit year will be very good, but, as always, we still need to be careful.

The Ox Divination

According to traditional Tibetan astrology, the tendencies for the year - the weather, rainfall, people's health, animals' health, the crops and so on - are indicated through the divination of the ox and the cowherd. There are many different ways to introduce the year and its tendencies but the most common and easy to understand is through the ox, so I will try to explain the Water Rabbit year through the Ox Divination.

The ox represents animals and the cowherd represents humans while the two other elements are the Earth, mother earth, and the sky. In some ways it is similar to the *lungta* prayer flags.

When we observe the diagram of the ox and the cowherd, we take note of the color of the ox, its tail, the color of its hooves, the color of the cowherd, his age, whether he is in front of the ox or behind it, whether he is wearing shoes or not, how he wears his hair, and the material his whip is made of. All these factors correspond to the five elements, and then there are explanations.

This year is the Water Rabbit. In general, the color of the ox is green, which means we may have abundant crops but also *lung* disorders. The stomach area of the ox is white. This shows that, globally, this year we will have some obstacles. The ox's horns, ears, tail and head are blueish. This indicates that the more northerly regions may have more obstacles. On the other hand, in spring or the beginning of spring, beginning of summer, beginning of autumn, those regions may have more

rain. The four legs of the ox are red meaning that the climate of the valley areas or desert areas will be hotter and wildfires may also be possible.

The mouth area of the ox is a little greenish, so virtuous actions may not be very successful this year. The mouth of the ox is closed and the tail of the ox is turned to the right. It means this year is not so good for animals, especially very young animals and animals that produce milk, like cows. For humans, if we look at the mouth and the tail of the ox, the situation is slightly better, compared to animals.

This year the cowherd is elderly meaning that the year is slightly better for people advanced in age, a little difficult for people of middle age and especially for children. The right side of the shepherd's hair lies more towards the back, while the left side is more to the front. This indicates that relationships and global peace will be average. There will be fewer virtuous actions, and an average quantity of non-virtuous actions. The cowherd is wearing both shoes which indicates that all people will be a little busy this year and there will be abundant rains. The color of the cowherd is reddish, his clothes are greenish, and he's wearing a yellow belt indicating that the economic situation will be medium, not that good.

This year the cowherd is running behind the ox, while the ox is in front. This is a little difficult for animals. The spring comes a little late in the high mountain area this year. The whip is made of grass indicating that this year kings will have problems with their ministers who, in turn, will not be very kind to people. In particular, the cowherd is holding the whip above his head



The image of the ox and the herdsman for the divination.

as if ready to hit someone. That shows also that the people will have less peace.

On the ground there are ten animals, the maximum number, which indicates that the crops should be fine. The autumn will be good and long. There is one dragon in the sky meaning that in general there will be average rains.

In conclusion, there is a lot of green and red, which represent the Wood and Fire elements. For that reason people may tend to have diseases linked to excessive Wood and Fire. In particular, if a person wants to open a business or something similar, he or she may meet some obstacles. The color green represents the Wood element. The entire ox is green, while its stomach area is white. The stomach area is like a container for all the organs of the body. It is white which means its element is Metal so because the stomach area is white, Metal, it means that no matter how hard our body [Wood element] works, the container [Metal] is not in harmony with it. This year since the ox's body is green, but the stomach is white, it's not very positive. The four legs are moving and touching the ground, so this refers to lower areas. When the ground is too hot it means there is a great possibility for fire to break out.

What can we learn from this? Firstly, we should be careful with *lung* or wind disorders. Secondly, if a person has a blood disease, skin disease, or any gallbladder issues, this year they shouldn't stay in a desert area, a low valley or a region with a hot climate. Thirdly, if a person tends to have a lot of anger, this year may be difficult so it's good to do practices such as Vajrasattva or Avalokiteshvara.

In general, considering the element of the year, it is good to wear clothes that are red, blue, and white. Yellow and green may not be the best option. This year the ages that have more obstacles and difficul-

ties are zero (newborn), thirteen years old, twenty-five, thirty-seven, forty-nine, sixty-one, seventy-three, eighty-five and ninety-seven. People of these ages need to be careful and in particular for those people who are 85 and 73, this year is a little weak.

The Four Friends

There is a tale about the Four Friends, which comes from a sutra teaching given by the Buddha. The purpose of this teaching is to show that collaboration and respect are very important.

Today, many of us do not need something extra as we have more than enough. We have enough food, which is the most important thing to keep us alive, and we have a roof over our heads. However, many of our human brothers and sisters have neither food nor a roof above them. If we look around, we will see that this is very true today, and until we experience some serious problems ourselves, we don't feel other people's problems.

For example, recently there was a big disaster, an earthquake, in Turkey where many people died, however we soon forgot about it. I'm not saying we don't care but since we are not in the middle of a disaster, we don't feel that bad. Similarly there are a lot of problems in many different places, all kinds of suffering such as natural disasters, but there is nothing much we can do. In addition, we also have a lot of man-made sufferings, at the global level, at the national level, and at the level of the family.

If we ask people, "Do you need a piece of gold?" Yes, if we have it, that's good, but if we don't, that's also fine. If we ask people, "Do you want to have peace?" Yes, we all want to have a peaceful life, no one wants to live with suffering. It doesn't matter who you are, where you are, if you are learned or not, which type of religion you believe, which

culture you belong to, which color you are – these are all secondary conditions – the most important thing is that no one likes to suffer. But if we are looking for peace, how can this peace come about and from where? It comes from respecting and understanding others. If I respect you, automatically you will respect me. If I mistreat you, I will receive the same treatment sooner or later and I will be the loser, not the winner.

As Shantideva said, we do not need a lot of weapons, we need only one: to be able to look at our own character, our own poisons. Shantideva also said that our mind is like a crazy elephant that we should bind with our consciousness, our presence. He said that rather than trying to control our enemies it is better that we try to control our three poisons. If we want to walk [barefoot] on the ground, there are a lot of things that can hurt our feet. It isn't possible to cover all the earth with leather but if we just put a small piece of leather under our feet [shoes], then it will be equivalent to the entire world covered with leather.

The story of The Four Friends starts like this. Once upon a time there was a country probably where Sarnath is situated today. And in that area there lived four animals: an elephant, a monkey, a rabbit and a bird. They lived there and respected each other. They shared food and lived very peacefully. The four animals had four different characters but they understood that to be able to live harmoniously, they needed to share space, food, everything. Other animals, who did not want to be attacked by others, also joined them and they became a bigger community and lived very peacefully.

One day the bird said, "Now we all live quite well and in harmony but now since more animals are joining us and the community is becoming bigger, we need to cre-

» continued on the following page

» continued from previous page

ate some rules". So they decided to create rules in order to be able to live continuously in this peaceful way: they should not kill, should not attack other animals, should not steal others' food, should not mistreat others, and should not misbehave sexually. And they lived that way and it was very successful.

One day again the bird said, "So far we're doing very well, but we are still missing something. What we're missing is that the younger ones respect their elders and the elders should take care of the younger ones. We need to decide who should respect who and who should take care of who. We need a new rule."

Then they decided that the one who arrived first on this land would be the older one. At that time there was a large tree growing there. The elephant said, "When I came here, the size of the tree was the same as my body." Then the monkey said, "When I came here, the size of the tree was also almost like my body size." The rabbit said, "When I came here, two leaves appeared on the tree and I licked the dew from them." Then the bird said, "When I came here, there was nothing. I went to other places, ate the fruit and then left my droppings here, and in that place the tree grew."

They decided the younger one should respect the older one and since the elephant was the youngest, he should respect the monkey; likewise since the monkey was younger than the rabbit, he should respect him, and the rabbit was younger than the bird and respected him. So according to their age, the bird was on the top, supported by the rabbit, the rabbit was supported by the monkey, and below was the elephant. And they continued in that

way and in the whole region they had good rains, good crops, healthy animals and everybody lived very peacefully.

The king of that region thought, "I am doing very well. I run this kingdom so well that everybody lives very harmoniously." The minister of that kingdom thought, "I am a very smart minister, I care for this kingdom so well that everything is very harmonious." The king thought that this harmony was the result of his hard work, and the minister, that of his and they argued about this.

There was a great practitioner, a yogi, and they went to ask him whose merit the harmony in the kingdom was. He told them that it was not the merit of either the king or his minister but the merit of the four animals who live very harmoniously in the jungle. Then the king and the minister went to the jungle, learned from the four animals and later applied the same rules for the people of the kingdom: don't attack anyone, don't steal other people's food, and so on, what we nowadays call the ten non-virtuous actions.

We can bring this story into our daily lives. Before I was born, my parents were here and without parents, we would not be here, so we pay respect to them. We also pay respect to our ancestors, our older family members, grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, and so on who brought us into this world. We thank them and we respect them. Then there are the so-called "senior citizens". Everything that we use today, originated or came from them so we respect them, we thank them. Also in the Dzogchen Community Rinpoche gave us rules on how we should continue the Community and what we should do. Since the Community has become big, there are also some guidelines, not rules, because Rinpoche never

Khewang Phuntsog Wangmo

received her advanced degree from the Lhasa University School of Traditional Medicine in 1988 and dedicated many years of work as a doctor of Tibetan Medicine in Eastern Tibet, collaborating with A.S.I.A., the non-profit organization founded by Professor Namkhai Norbu. From 1997-2000, she was the A.S.I.A. project coordinator in Tibet for the development of Gamthog Hospital, supervising healthcare activities throughout Chamdo Prefecture.

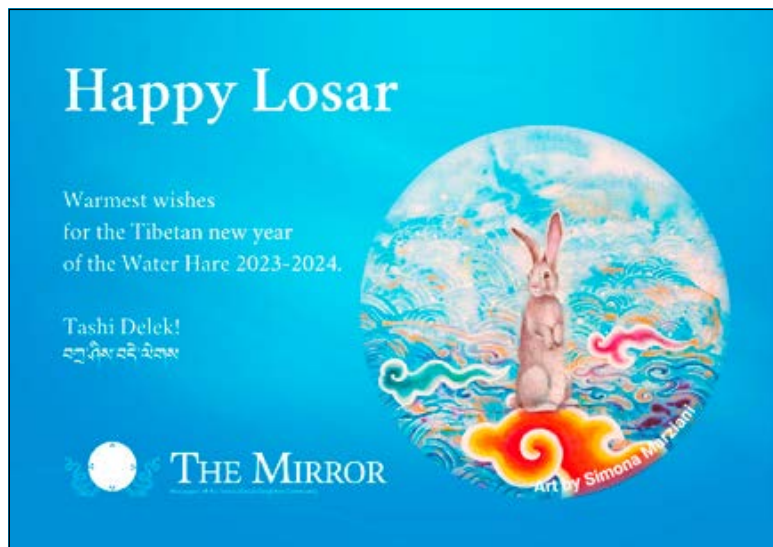
In 2007 she co-founded the American Tibetan Medical Association (ATMA), a national organization representing the Tibetan medical profession within the United States. In 2012 Dr. Phuntsog Wangmo was appointed the International Director of the School of Tibetan Medicine and is currently in residence at the Shang Shung Institute of America, where she continues as Director and International Director of the Institute's national and international programs in U.S.A., Russia and Tenerife, Spain.

said we should have something mandatory. But there is something like guidelines.

To understand this story, you do not need to have a great capacity or to be learned. It's very simple to understand. The elephant is the biggest and could say, "I will be the boss", like today when everyone who is bigger physically, everyone who has more power, becomes the boss. The rabbit is very smart so it could have found another method or idea to manipulate the others. The monkey could very easily have said, "If you do that, I won't share the fruit with you," because the monkey was the only one who could reach it. The bird could have said, "Whatever you want to do, I don't care because I can fly everywhere." But they didn't. They said, "We want to respect each other. We will respect who is the elder and will take care of who is the younger."

I told you the other day that Rinpoche said that we need to have evolution, not revolution. Whether it is a harmonious family, community, society or global world, we need to respect each other and, as Rinpoche said many times, to collaborate. That is why I think this story about the four friends is very good and very useful to tell to children. It's very simple to present, but it has an important meaning. ©

Transcribed and edited by Anastasia Eremenko from a talk given by Dr. Phuntsog at Tashigar Sur on February 20, 2023. Final editing by L. Granger



Ka-Ter: What a Pleasure!

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

Like the sun rise brings clarity and happiness to all beings,

the latest work of the Shang Shung Publication brings wisdom and understanding of one's own nature to all beings!

The latest book **Chögyal Namkhai Norbu** *The Luminous Clarity of the Universe A Clear Exposition of The Primordial Pure Tregchöd* was translated from Tibetan, edited and annotated by Adriano Clemente on the basis of earlier translations by Jim Valby and Elio Guarisco.

The translators and editors of this book have worked on this unique and essential text for more than 18 years. All their work was sponsored by **your generous donations** to the Ka-Ter Translation Project.

With incredible joy and pleasure I present to you this extraordinary and voluminous book with more than 550 pages!

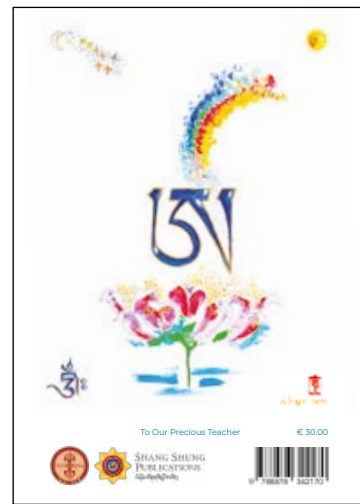
This precious book is a marvelous guide to the essence of our being through the knowledge of one of the most ancient teachings of timeless, primordial wisdom.

It is one of the earliest books on Dzogchen authored by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. Originally conceived as a compendium of instructions drawn from Dzogchen Upadesha tantras and the writings on Longchenpa and Jigmed Lingpa on the basis of personal experience, the author enriched it in 2005 with several verses from *The Upadesha of The Primordial Purity* from his own rediscovered cycle of teachings known as Longsal.

A great thank you to everyone who collaborated in this long-lasting work!

The book will be available in the shop of **Shang Shung Publications** in early May 2023.

However, the translation work is not finished with the publication of this book. At the moment, Adriano Clemente, the Dzogchen Community's main translator from Tibetan to English, is working on the translation of the commentary to the



Front Cover
by Kay Konrad
Back Cover
by Giorgio Dallorto

Longsal Introduction to the State of Ati (A ti'i dgongs pa ngo sprod), a crucial explanation of the four contemplations of Ati.

Other projects to be completed in 2023 include

- * a new, revised edition of *The Mirror: Advice on Presence and Awareness*,
- * *Atiyoga: The Essence of All Teachings*, containing the chapters on the view from Santi Maha Sangha first and second levels plus new sections mostly from the Drathalgyur commentary by Vimalamitra.

Other important books translated by Adriano Clemente will be published in the next months:

- * *The Cuckoo of Rigpa: An Ancient Dunhuang Manuscript*
- * *Longsal Commentaries Volume Six: The Preliminaries of the Path of Ati.*

With the support of the Ka-Ter Translation Project, Shang Shung Publications has already published the book *The Aventures of Nyima, Dawa and the Little Yak* by Laura Evangelisti & The Kumar Kumari Yantra Yoga Team, which is a beautiful children's picture book on Kumar Kumari, a journey to discover magical Tibet and the powerful sounds of Kumar Kumari, Yantra Yoga for children.

Another important book based on the translation work supported by the Ka-Ter Translation Project will also be published soon by Shang Shung Publications:

Padmasambhava's Advice on Total Perfection. A Hidden Treasure Discovered by Dorje Lingpa. The teachings contained in this volume consist of a rich collection of advice and methods of practice which have the sole aim of helping the practitioner to actually discover their real condition of Total Perfection, or Dzogchen, and remain in this presence. The book is a commentary to an ancient Tibetan text discovered by a 14th century master known as Dorje Lingpa.

A great job has been done by the translator(s), the editors, and people who have done the layout and graphic designs of these books!

Their wonderful and admirable work is based on your generosity by supporting all the various works of the Ka-Ter Translation Project.

Please continue to support our attempt to translate and publish books of our Master in the best possible quality!

For more information, have a look at the text about **20 years Ka-Ter Translation Project**, <https://ka-ter.org/>.

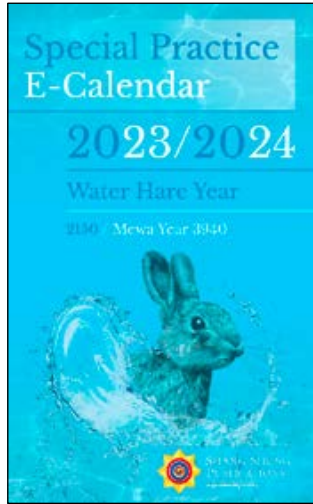
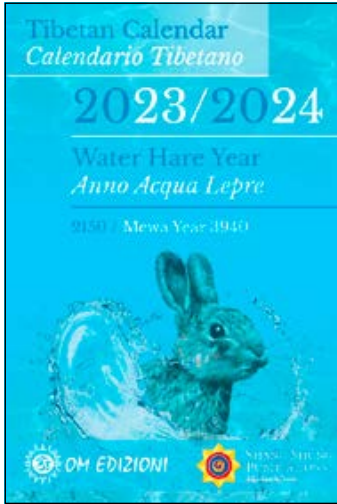
On behalf of the Ka-Ter Translation team, I thank you, Donors and Supporters, for your whole-hearted participation and understanding of the importance of the work we are doing jointly.

» continued on the following page



Dear Readers,
Here you can find the latest news about Shang Shung Publications.

Recently published books:



Tibetan Calendar/Calendario Tibetano 2023–2024

Tibetan Calendar for the Water Hare Year 2150. Updated annually, this pocket agenda contains concise indications of the practices recommended by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu for special days, astrological aspects from the Tibetan lunar calendar, individual influences affecting those born between 1923 and 2023, and positive and negative days for Naga practice.

https://shop.shangshungfoundation.com/en/products/9788878342262_ebook-tibetan-calendar-calendario-tibetano-202324-pdf.html

Special Practice Calendar 2023–2024

The Special Practice Calendar was first compiled by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu many years ago and contains his indications for each special day in the lunar year. In addition to describing specific practices for Padmasambhava Day, Dakini Day, and full and new moon, this calendar covers anniversaries of many masters from the Buddhist and Bön traditions in Tibet who are also connected with the Dzogchen transmission.

https://shop.shangshungfoundation.com/en/products/9788878342279_e-book-special-practice-calendar-2023-2024-pdf.html

The Adventures of Nyima, Dawa and the Little Yak.

Laura Evangelisti & The Kumar Kumari Yantra Yoga Team Watercolor illustrations by Cristina Conticelli
A beautiful children's picture book on Kumar Kumari. A journey to discover magical Tibet and the powerful sounds of Kumar Kumari, Yantra Yoga for children.

https://shop.shangshungfoundation.com/en/products/9788878342231_ebook-the-adventures-of-nyima-dawa-the-little-yak-pdf.html

» continued from previous page

Together we have succeeded in completing so much!

Please keep up your fruitful efforts to make these unique wisdom texts accessible to our and future generations!

Please send your donation to our bank account:

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.

You can also send donations via [REVOLUT](#), use 0043 664 88662660 or use IBAN: LT48 3250 0488 1616 3042, BIC: REVOLT21

Thank you so much for your donations!
Very best wishes,

Oliver Leick
Director of the Shang Shung Institute
Austria
phone: +43 664 8866 2660
office@ssi-austria.at
www.ssi-austria.at



Upcoming Restricted books:

The Luminous Clarity of the Universe

A Clear Exposition of the Principle of Primordially Pure Tregchöd
(*Ka dag khregs chod kyi dgongs pa gsal bshad klong chen 'od gsal*).

This book is one of the earliest books on Dzogchen authored by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu and was originally conceived as a compendium of instructions drawn from the main tantras of the Dzogchen Upadeśa series and from the writings of Longchenpa (1308–1364) and Jigmed Lingpa (1730–1798) on the basis of personal knowledge and experience.

It will be ready in early May.

When You Discover One, You Discover All

Practice Instructions Related to
Changchubsem Gomba Dola Sershun by
Mañjushrimitra.

In the Tibetan texts belonging to the Dzogchen Semde series, the most ancient texts are considered the first five translations of Vairochana, namely Rigpai Khujug, Tsalchen Trugpa, Khyungchen Dingwa, Dola Sershun, Minubpai Gyaltsen (also called Dorje Sempa Namkha Che), and the Mejung, amounting at six. ...These practice instructions, attributed to Nubchen Sangye Yeshe, are given in a pure Dzogchen style, therefore they are extremely precious for Atiyoga practitioners, and most probably it is the very first time that they were transmitted in the West. For this reason the Shang Shung Publications Editorial Team decided to publish the transcription of this oral commentary even if a translation from the Tibetan is still not available.

The Vajra Dance of Space

New book of Vajra Dance of Space of the Song of the Vajra

Upcoming public books:

The Cuckoo of Rigpa

An Ancient Dunhuang Manuscript.

Rig pai khu byug

The Six Vajra Verses are the essence of all the teachings of self-perfected Dzogpa Chenpo. When the great translator Vairocana introduced the precious Dzogpa Chenpo teaching in Tibet, as a sign of goodness and auspiciousness first of all he translated from the language of Oḍḍiyāna into Tibetan these six verses known as "Auspicious Glory", giving them the name "The Cuckoo of Rigpa".

Padmasambhava's Advice on Total Perfection

A Hidden Treasure Discovered by
Dorje Lingpa

The teachings contained in this volume consist of a rich collection of advice and methods of practice which have the sole aim of helping the practitioner to actually discover their real condition of Total Perfection or Dzogchen, and remain in this presence. The book is a commentary to an ancient Tibetan text discovered by a 14th century master known as Dorje Lingpa.

Introduction to The Vajra Dance.

The first public book about Vajra Dances This volume is divided into two parts. Part One is dedicated to a selection of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's written and oral teachings on the principles of Dzogchen, the Vajra Dance and related topics. Part Two, which is dedicated to the actual practice, reproduces two chapters of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's main work on the Dance of the Vajra, titled "The Precious Lamp". These chapters are taken from Adriano Clemente's English translation of the Ti-

betan text and describe two Vajra Dances: the Vajra Dance of the Six Spaces and the Dance of the Three Vajras.

A General Presentation of Dzogchen

The Biography of Ayu Khandro

Aprire la Mente

Italian translation of Opening our Minds

We would like to point out that many of our texts are available in ebook versions. Shang Shung is trying to publish as many ebook versions as possible in order to give their readers the possibility to save on shipping costs and to reduce in general production costs due to significant increases in the cost of paper, services, and couriers.

Please explore our webshop: <https://shop.shangshungfoundation.com/en/>;

To see all ebooks, click on "ebooks" at the top of the webshop window on the left: https://shop.shangshungfoundation.com/en/products/explore/?support_type=ebook

To contribute to the continuation of Shang Shung Publications' activities please donate to https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted_button_id=44UNB8ZE9ZJAS

Reason: Donation for the SSP editorial program For more information and further details on the editorial program, please write to info@shangshungpublications.com

Shang Shung Publications Team



Shang Shung Foundation · International Institute for Tibetan Culture

Shang Shung Foundation, Italy
Località Merigar, 58031 Arcidosso (GR, Italy)
Giovanni Totino g.totino@shangshunginstitute.org
www.shangshungfoundation.org
www.shangshungstore.org

Shang Shung Institute Austria
Gersdorfberg 19, 8212 Pischelsdorf, Austria
Office: 0043 664 88 66 26 60
office@ssi-austria.at
www.ssi-austria.at

Shang Shung Institute UK
Lekdanling, Tibetan Cultural Centre
14 Collent Street, Hackney, London, E9 6SG. UK
www.shangshunguk.org

Shang Shung Institute of America
18 Schoolhouse Rd, PO. Box 278
Conway, MA 01341, USA
Phone (main-Anna) 413 369 4928
Fax/Bookstore 413 369 4473
www.shangshung.org

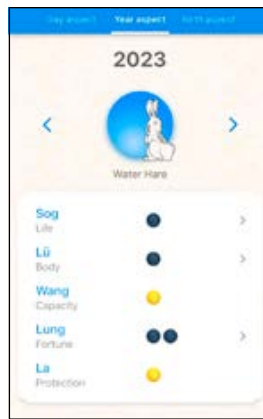
Shang Shung Institute Russia
2v Mayakovskogo str.
Bolshiye Dvory, Pavlovsky Posad district
Russia 142541
info@shangshunginstitute.ru
www.shangshunginstitute.ru
www.tibetanmedicineschool.ru
<https://www.facebook.com/shangshungrussia>

“Alendar” in the Sangha App



The Year of the Female Water Hare is here! It brings opportunities and challenges associated with your Birth, Year and Day aspects. How can you deal with them?

In the “Alendar,” we offer you all the info and advice according to the Tibetan astrology used in the International Dzogchen Community. Although these circumstances can be relative, it’s very useful to know about them, in order to stay present and apply what’s needed.



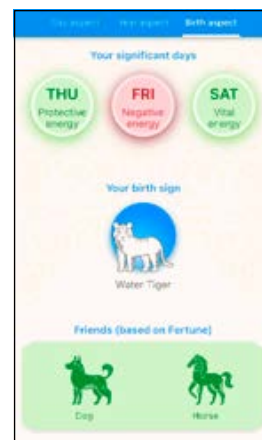
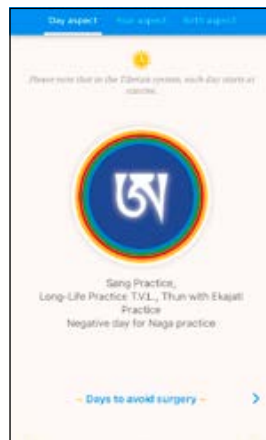
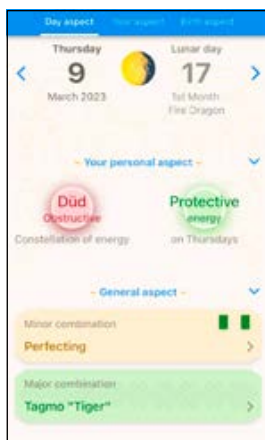
Year Aspect

Important Categories

You can view predictions for your Life, Body, Capacity, Fortune and Protection categories based on the interaction of your birth year and the current year.

Indications to Harmonize

You will find indications about what to apply if a prediction is not favourable (black dots). Just click on the arrow for the details



Day Aspect

Minor & Major Combinations

The minor and major combination for each day is shown, with the corresponding explanations and the energy constellations as well. Use the arrow or red button to easily select any day.

Special Days and Indicated Practices

Below you find which practices of the IDC are recommended according to the Merigar calendar, including anniversaries, Ganapujas and Naga days.

When to Avoid Surgery

You can check on which days to avoid surgery, related to the parts of the body. The mantras to transform bad days are also included! We’ve put additional info about suitable days for haircuts and travel.

Birth Aspect

Significant Days & Friends

The app will automatically calculate your birth sign according to the birth date you have in your profile. Based on that, it will also provide your significant days of the week. There is also information about which signs have the same (i.e. friendly) element of fortune.

Personal Elements

The app will display a list of your personal elements with respect to the main categories. And one more highlight. You can check all the Astrological Details for another person too! Just change the birth date in the field above the aspect menu and the app will recalculate for that person.

Make sure you have the latest version of Sangha App in order to access all the useful information directly from your phone.



Need even more information about Tibetan astrology?

Related detailed information is also presented in the book of the Dynamic Space of Elements project.

Jung-We Kyil-Khor: Mandala of Astrological Elements by Migmar Tsering

The book can be obtained by a donation of 15 € (excluding shipping) via their website

Wishing you all the best for this year, and for the ones to come.

May it be beneficial!

Sangha App Team
hello@mahasangha.net
www.mahasangha.net



#Mongolia “From the Village to the World”

Promoting digital literacy in the most remote areas of Mongolia

From the Village to the World is an ASIA project, funded by the Italian Buddhist Union, which was launched a year ago in Mongolia, more precisely in the province of Sukhbaatar.

The project aims to promote development in the populated areas in the province of Sukhbaatar by overcoming the lack of computer literacy in the area, one of the most remote in Mongolia. We are carrying this out through training courses for at least 30 teachers from the 13 districts of the province and by supplying the schools participating in the project with information technology tools.

The latest updates

After delivering and installing 13 SMART boards in 13 schools in the province by the end of 2022, we offered training courses on their use, which produced excellent results! The courses, in addition to dealing with digital teaching, ranged from binary logic to cloud computing, from artificial intelligence to cyber security.

Also at the end of last year, we distributed educational materials to the libraries of 4 schools in the provinces of Uulbayan, Khalzan and Asgat.

Why are we active in this area?

In the last 20 years Mongolia has been characterized by a very strong internal migration. On the one hand, migrants often end up being marginalized on the outskirts of the city with no marketable skills and few possibilities of integration, leading increasingly to alcoholism, poverty, unemployment and domestic violence. On the other hand, while the western area of the country attracts thousands of tourists every year, this does not happen in the province of Sukhbaatar, from which, according



to official data, a thousand people migrate to the capital every year.

One of the problems that leads to marginalization, unemployment and poverty for those who travel to the city is their total lack of technological and digital skills, especially due to the fact that in Sukhbaatar access to the web is severely limited because of the lack of connection and computer workstations. It is therefore essential to intervene by bridging the technological gap between this region and other areas of the country, not only to train individuals who will be able to adapt to the city if they decide to emigrate one day, but also to decrease the emigration rate thanks to an increase in the level of digital education.

Do you want to become a friend of ASIA? The **Friends of ASIA** continuously support our projects for the people of the Himalayas.

Let's become friends! It is essential for us to know that we can count on your support.

Click here to learn more and to become a friend of ASIA, too!

Visit our website to find out more and to become a friend of ASIA too!

www.asia-ngo.org/en



ASIA Branches

ASIA Main Office
Via San Martino della Battaglia 31, 00185 Rome, Italy
T. +39 06 44 34 00 34
info@asia-ngo.org www.asia-ngo.org

ASIA Germany
Wolfgang Schweiger
Würmstrasse 10, 82131 Stockdorf, Germany
T. +49 89 12 76 30 32
info@asia-ngo.org www.asia-ngo.org

ASIA France
Anna De Luca
7, rue de la Glacière, 25660 La Vèze, France
T. +33 673 87 80 26
asiafrance@asia-ngo.org

Dance from Tibetan Dances and Cosmic Education

An excerpt from 'Dance from Tibetan Dances and Cosmic Education', an article written by Adriana Dal Borgo for the book *Con Montessori ed oltre*, Vol.2', published by TAB Edizioni <https://www.tabedizioni.it/shop/product/con-montessori-e-oltre-422>

Translated by Miranda Shannon

This excerpt is from an article that was conceived and written as a contribution to a project by the "tenera-mente - onlus" association, 'Montessori ed oltre' (Montessori and Beyond), a two-volume work bringing together essays by university professors and expert testimony of original educational experiences in the field of disciplines that did not exist or had not been established in Montessori's time.

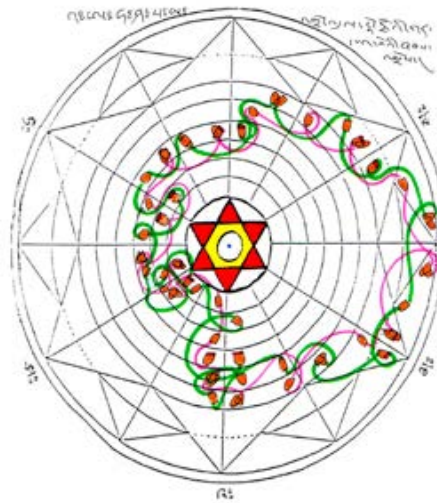
When Enrica Baldi, founder of the 'tenera-mente' association, as well as a student of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu and a dear friend, contacted me to invite me to participate in the project as an 'expert' in dances, I accepted with enthusiasm. I thought it would be an excellent opportunity to rethink Rinpoche's Teachings of the Vajra Dance and Khaita Joyful Dances from an educational perspective and also to reflect on how to present them to an audience outside the Dzogchen Community, in simple and non-self-referential language. The article, published in Vol. 2 of the text, is the result of these reflections.

4. Dance As An Educational Path

4.1 Goals

Why is dance a valuable educational tool?

To dance means to create and share with children and young people moments of emotional, playful and relational experience to promote well balanced and comprehensive personal growth. Dance teaches the student to know their own body and to use movement to communicate with others, and discover how the quality of movement is strictly linked to space, musical rhythm, and last but not least to the people around us.



Sequence of steps on the Mandala. Design by Namkhai Norbu 1991.

The rhythmic-musical element assumes a fundamental importance in the individual education. In particular according to the theoretician and choreographer Rudolf Laban, dance produces an organized cooperation of our mental emotional and physical faculties resulting in actions of great importance for coordination, harmony and personality development. From this point of view, dance mainly means moving with awareness and increasing one's capacity for observation. It noticeably influences social relationships: the closeness of one's peers, the need to express oneself and communicate with others, and the need to be understood, strengthen friendships and encourage inclusion. Dance can become a tool to overcome age related conflicts facilitating the assimilation of the individual's qualities into a harmonious group.

4.2 Developing Skills

4.2.1 Functional Skills

- General motor coordination: the perception of one's body in motion promotes the structuring of body image, which dance helps to integrate and complete.
- Segmented coordination: the ability to coordinate the movement of the upper and lower limbs (for example moving the right leg and right arm, or on the contrary the left leg and right arm) and the independent use of the upper and lower limbs, (e.g. taking steps and gesturing at the same time); this capacity enhances the awareness of one's body.
- Laterality: the student is constantly stimulated to be aware of their own laterality (right and left) in relation to themselves, others and the surrounding space.

4.2.2 Cognitive Skills

Dance promotes;

- spatial organization and orientation characterized by the direction of movement backward and forward, left and right, its extent (large or small, short or long, near or far), its level (high or low), and its appearance (zigzag, spiral, and circular).
- timing which is expressed through duration (slow or fast), the succession of actions (before or after) or simultaneity: two identical or two different movements occurring at the same time.
- sense of rhythm: if rhythm is a natural movement, the body is the ultimate rhythmic instrument: fast movements imply fluency and liveliness, while slow movements imply control, balance and inner calm.
- motor imitation: at the end of a choreographic sequence learned by imitation, the student can repeat it mentally which promotes the capacity for internalization and representation.
- memorization of step sequences and choreographic patterns.

4.2.3 Physiological Strengthening

Through dance, the student will improve cardio-respiratory function, mobility and muscle flexibility.

4.2.4 Relational Skills

Dance is a collective activity that takes place in a context of play and fun. For this reason, it fosters a sense of socialization, belonging and cohesion, as well as promoting cooperation aimed at reaching a common goal. Collective dances offer students several opportunities to discover "the pleasure of doing and playing" with their peers through movement. Based on a respect for rules, group dance develops trust in oneself and others thereby improving self-esteem. These relational aspects make dance an important tool for the integration of students experiencing distress and /or socio-relational problems, sometimes fulfilling a therapeutic function. ©

Differently One

An exciting new program being developed in Dzamling Gar for people with diverse functionality

Interview with Carmen Rivas and Gloriana Brenes
November 18, 2022
Dzamling Gar

The Mirror: Today is November 16th, 2022, and we are here in Dzamling Gar with Carmen Rivas and Gloriana Brenes. We are interviewing them about an exciting new program that is going to be developed here; a program for people with diverse functionality.

Carmen has been doing this work for quite some time, so we wanted to interview her about her extensive experience and knowledge. Carmen's experience and knowledge is the basis for the programming that will be developed here. So it's very important that we talk with her and understand what has been her experience and how that will help create the programming at Dzamling Gar.

So, Carmen, can you tell us about when you first started doing this programming in Caracas, Venezuela and about how you came to the idea to work in this way with people with diverse functionality through the Vajra Dance?

Carmen: I was giving a course on Vajra Dance in Caracas. And in this course there was one doctor who had two nephews that had certain difficulties with movement and learning. When this doctor learned Vajra Dance, he became very interested. He saw the potential to spread it to a group of people with diverse functionality that he had been working with already for quite a while.

In this group there were people who had Down's syndrome, some aspects of autism, motor difficulties, difficulties of attention and learning. And this particular group was already quite organized, and for me it was a surprise because I had never been approached with this sort of invitation.

And at that particular time we were very lucky to have Rinpoche physically with us. I went to Rinpoche and asked him if I can teach the Vajra Dance to this particular group with these challenges. On the same day, almost immediately, he responded 'Yes, go ahead'.



Carmen Rivas (left) Gloriana Brenes (right).

And that was a big challenge for me because, of course, I had never had a contact with such diverse people. And I didn't know what kind of things to expect and what difficulties would come.

Then I started to study the profile of each person, just trying to understand what I was going to deal with and also being aware that the studies tell you exactly how it goes and it gives you a lot of information, but it doesn't really give you the full scope of what is going to happen. I thought that the Dance of the Three Vajras would be the most essential and easy for them to learn, but at that time the transmission was required. So, being very shy and also very careful, I asked Rinpoche if I could teach the Dance of the Three Vajras to this group. And he said, 'Yes, please, that's the best'.

I started to prepare myself and the Gakyil of Caracas organized this activity very well. Then we started working and prepared all the different aspects so that it could really be a successful program. But there was something particular. At that time Rinpoche told us to be aware and to spread the news outside and in social media.

And this was very particular, because with this kind of people, when others got to know about it, they became more open and sensitive and wanted to participate.

So it was a very well organized event: we got the best place, the best sound, everybody helped, everything was organized by the local authorities with the presence of news media, TV channels and everything. So I was very happy with all of this and we started the course.

This was in 2015. The first day was the first step and it was quite chaotic and I really didn't know exactly how to start the

experience. Also, the kids were very attentive, but they also realized it was very difficult to do. Because when you do this movement open like this, many of them only knew how to do the opposite, to close. But I noticed they were really interested and wanted to learn. They showed so much joy. They were happy and they didn't really care if they made mistakes. They actually enjoyed, laughed, and even when they were making a mistake, they were trying their best and still carried on.

It's really caught my attention and made me very happy to see that they were not afraid to make mistakes, they were laughing and they would just continue on the mandala and try again and try to fulfill what was needed.

This particular thing, not making a problem when they did a mistake, no judgement, and trying again and again, really gave me a lot of inspiration and made me want to continue. I had a lot of help and support from their therapists, teachers and also parents. But also, of course, from practitioners of the Community who knew the dance. So we were a team.

Within the five days, working each morning, the Pawos learned the inner dance of the Pawo, and the Pamos learned the outer dance. And they were doing it very well.

If there was one person who couldn't move correctly and would do it differently, it was perfect for their condition. And if there was somebody very distracted and, instead of moving both arms, they would move one arm first and then the other, the important thing is that they were really trying to do it well. That really stimulated me a lot. And I could notice that they could

» continued on the following page



Khaita in Adeje.

» continued from previous page

really relax. And they were happy when they finished.

Then we did the second part, where Pawos learned the outer dance and how to enter and also exit. And the Pamos also learned the inner dance and also how to enter. And finally, they did the whole dance.

And, of course, it was not as perfect as some of us would do it, but they were perfect in the timing, they were perfect in the space. As for the movement, they had challenges but it was perfect for their condition. Some of them were really perfect, and some others had a little bit of difficulty, but it was still perfect for them.

I learned so much from them. And I learned that the perfection for us is also relative. Because for them they were doing their best and they were practicing very seriously. One very important aspect for me was to share with them joy and gratefulness for what they were doing. And they were able to share that joy and gratefulness for what they were doing and they considered it an achievement.

So in my case, not only I was sure that it would benefit so much their physical condition that they would also do it, they would, they also manifested a better condition. They were also more relaxed. The therapists and the parents reported to me that their condition really improved. There were very concrete results, like for instance, there was one girl who had very deep depression. And her parents and therapists later reported that her attitude changed.

There was one quadriplegic boy who would move on a wheelchair. But he wanted to participate. Sitting, he would only do the A with a lot of difficulty, but he would do it constantly. At the end of the course he was able to raise his right arm. And his

mom told me, 'Look, look. Now Achilles can eat.' It was very, very strong implication for the body, speech and mind of each one of them. So, of course, there were benefits on the physical level, but I'm sure that on the energy level they had deep benefits related to Rinpoche's transmission. So I am convinced that potentiality of the dance, the space of the mandala, the timing, the sound of the mantra and the movements made a lot of impact and benefit.

M: And are they able to continue to use this method that they learned? You had this one course and that was all that you were able to do or?

C: There was a follow-up but it did not last. Sadly enough, that year the political situation and safety situation in Caracas was very difficult, there were many protests, much disorder. And therefore, even though they found a place to continue dancing, a public square, it was a quite a privileged place and very secure, and the parents didn't want to take the risk to take children there.

Nevertheless the director of the center reported to me that most of them kept doing the dance of the A at home. We were able to achieve all this due to the openness and positivity of the Gakyil who really wanted to try this out and to carry on this program.

M: Is there any possibility, when you return to Venezuela, before you relocate in other places, that you would be able to continue?

C: Yes, in the next couple of months, when I will be back, in January and February, I will contact an already quite organized group in Merida, my home town. There are a lot of people dancing there and they are already trying to organize this type of activity with the local community. But you just gave

me an idea that I can actually contact the group in Caracas and see what happens.

M: Should we talk a little bit about the event that just happened here in Tenerife, in Adeje, and then also about the group of you who are working towards implementing something like this here for the local people of Adeje?

Let's talk about the course that you came to do here called 'Differently One' that's related to diverse functionality. Was it more for instructors?

C: There were people who didn't forget about this very special activity, like

Gloriana and some others who contacted me so that we could talk and discuss how to transmit this very essential and important teaching to people with diverse functionality.

Gloriana, with Dzamling Gar and Atiyoga Foundation, invited me to Dzamling Gar. I prepared myself learning what is the best way to approach and introduce this method to people with certain conditions, and especially how to guide them on the mandala, how to teach them to coordinate the right and the left, the inside and the outside, the sides, the steps, so that they can follow internalizing the movements, the sound and timing on the mandala. I worked along with Nataly Nitsche, who made a big contribution into this project, and together we came up with this program.

We had some people on site and there were other people in Zoom, but I am sure, whoever participated in that, were quite moved by it and got really inspired to continue and carry on to try to deepen this experience and make things more approachable to this diverse dimension.

Gloriana: The aim of 'Differently One' was more like a sharing. It was a sharing of Carmen's experience that she had in 2015. And it was for Vajra Dance instructors, of course, in case they would be inspired to do something like this, and also for any instructor in general. Because it was just a way of how to communicate to others, others with different conditions. It doesn't mean that it's necessarily diverse functionality. It could be really many other conditions - very shy people, introverts or people who don't do very well with failure. So it's about how you encounter these situations as an instructor. And also it was even not for instructors, it was really open for everyone, but who was interested to communicate in this way to different people. So the name of it was inspired by the fact that we

are all different in our own ways, but at the same time we are all one. This is why the name is 'Differently One'.

M: You set the stage for how these programs began and that you came also here to Tenerife to introduce things here and then you ended up going to Adeje and having contact with the person who runs these kinds of programs in Adeje. Can you talk about what happened there?

C: Based on this experience that we all shared and got really inspired, we told Casilda Gonzalez about our interest to make contact with the local authorities to ask if they might be interested that we do something like this. So we tried to establish a first contact with the government of the island and it was the Town Hall counselor of the section of diversity. We invited him to come to Dzamling Gar. Nataly, Adriana, Gloriana, Casilda and I were there, and we had a meeting.

It went very well, we discussed many interesting things, possibilities to establish open relationship between Dzamling Gar and local people of Adeje and the island in general, and develop more contacts thorough different cultural activities.

G: I must say one detail, the government representative that visited us was very special. He immediately connected with the place. His father worked on the same land here in Dzamling Gar, his mother learned to swim right next to the pool that is outside of Dzamling Gar. He recognized the rocks that he saw. Somehow he has a very strong connection to the land here and to the people who belong for years and generations to this particular place where Dzamling Gar is. That really moved me. We were all really impressed. He told us stories about different stones, textures and things. So it was very beautiful.

C: Yes, we had a wonderful time together. We had a beautiful sharing and he is a very open and humble person. So immediately he invited us to the upcoming celebration of the family gathering at the center for people with diverse functionality in Los Olivos, Adeje, where children and their parents get together.

We went there to make a presentation of Vajra Dance, not only to dance but also talk with the families, establish some kind of connection with them. We did a little bit of Vajra Dance so that they have some experience, and we invited them to participate. The kids were also participating. And then right after that, we also had a won-

derful experience of Khaita Joyful Dances, which was very joyful. It was beautiful that we could share both experiences in the same place. People were very much inspired. It touched everybody's heart. It was like a celebration somehow.

All people from Dzamling Gar really enjoyed the time there and not only us, but the local people also enjoyed. So instead of us teaching them something, it was more like a sharing and enjoying together. We shared space, we shared food, we shared a lot of conversations and then we also talked about the Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's teachings.

I think it's a great road to follow, where we are all equal. Even though we were doing a different experience, like Vajra Dance and Khaita, we are all the same, all one in the same space and in the same experience. This is the reason why we called it 'Differently One'. Because you can feel and live the experience that on this path we are all the same.

At those moments you feel that we are all the same and that in reality there is a great potentiality and capacity of the teaching that manifests in everyone. Even though we're all different, with the potentiality of Rinpoche's teaching, we all have the capacity to reach the same state.

The contact that we have with them really enriches our lives and expands the ordinary limits that we have further, going from our normal condition or normal experience beyond the limits.

For example, whenever they commit a mistake, they do not bother very much, they just continue and try to do their best. Many times they just laugh at their mistakes. And also they don't pretend to do things perfectly, but they just try to do their best. And this teaches us to work with circumstances. It's wonderful.

M: So now you establish this base of this activity in Adeje and do you see any way that it will go forward or continue?

G: Yes, right now, after this wonderful experience, we are very inspired, but, of course, we want to do things in a very careful way. So we had a meeting with Adriana Dal Borgo, Casilda Gonzalez, Carmen Rivas and I. (Nataly Nitsche was not in Dzamling Gar but she will participate). Now we really want to come up with a project in a concrete way that will be Dzamling Gar's project and that approaches the local community and specifically the diverse section.

We would like to bring Carmen again and all together make a team of Vajra

Dance instructors who are open for supporting this and will all collaboratively work together. We're thinking about a three month experience when we can establish certain phases of how to carry this kind of people into learning the Dance of the Three Vajras. But especially we want to come up with a program. There's a lot of potentiality there because while having Carmen here we can do another 'Differently One', now that people finally, maybe with this interview and with the videos that are coming up, might be inspired and would like to do this in their local community. I think it would be wonderful.

M: So this is not limited to Vajra Dance, is it?

G: No, but right now we are starting with Vajra Dance because we have this experience. But it's exactly about how to communicate Rinpoche's teachings to other people, how to communicate in a very essential but also very respectful way, really understanding others' dimension first, in order to carry this message the best way possible for others to understand. That's part of the program. We're still in it, we're still building it. We have a way to go into making this project because we want to do it well from the beginning till the end. As a result, we will have an experience that, we hope, can be replicated in wherever there might be an interest.

So it's not only to repeat it with a group of people, but at the same time train others how to do it, those who have the capacity, because not everybody is capable. But if you're interested, for sure you will be capable. So it's more like how to grow into this together and explore this aspect and path and communicate to others.

M: So 'Differently One' is a way to introduce and engage people who are interested to work with people with diverse functionality. And it happened that it worked out from the beginning with Carmen because she is a Vajra Dance teacher. But people from all the disciplines of the Dzogchen Community – Yantra Yoga, Khaita, Vajra Dance – can benefit from this kind of training, not only for people with diverse functionality but also with people in the Community or just in general, expanding their sensitivity to people when they teach. Is this correct?

G: And not only when you teach. It's how you carry yourself through life and and really understand the other's dimension. So it's really very beneficial on many levels.

>> continued on the following page

The Sounds and Scents of the Garden

An interview with the Dzamling Gar garden designer, Alix De Fermor

Mirror: Alix, most of the gardens at Dzamling Gar have been completed, but there's still the area on the north side of the Gönpa that has not been planted yet. Can you tell us about the work there and the type of plants you're planting?

Alix: Working here is quite difficult because the ground is full of construction material and rocks which are not easy to remove. We cannot use machinery for this and are doing everything by hand, moving earth and rocks with a wheelbarrow. For example, this strip that we have just planted in front of the Meriling house had very little soil that covered different types of water and electrical pipes when we started. So we had to bring soil from the upper part of the garden. Fortunately we had some help from karmayogis for this job and this area has become quite nice.

Then we have been working on another long strip of land on the other side of the path leading to the Gönpa. Up to now we've spent a lot of time and energy digging here by hand to remove the enormous rocks and construction material that are under the earth.

My idea is to isolate this area from the main road. Once all the large rocks have been removed we will put a few trees on each side of the road that leads from the side entrance of the Gar to the Gönpa. The part that is closer to the underground garages near the entrance will probably be more like a desert garden, a little bit like

.....
» continued from previous page

C: There is a very beautiful, from the heart, big door opening for all of us to be able to bring evolution. And this is the way how we can go towards this direction and really expand Rinpoche's teachings more, to certain people that never really get opportunity to get this experience. So I think it's an achievement for us and the whole world.

M: Thank you very much.



what we have on the other side of the Gönpa with cactus, succulents and local plants.

At the moment we are still discussing with the Gakyil how to approach the main area below the Gönpa which presents some particular problems for creating a garden. For example, the main part of the area has three enormous water tanks just a few centimeters below the surface, while another area is directly above a lower level office, all of which makes it impossible for larger trees and bushes to find space for their roots and for drainage. Since it is a bit late in the season to plant a garden, I think we will probably work on gradually organizing the terraces and the rocks so that we can plant later in the year when it is cooler and we won't need so much water.

Mirror: What mixture of soil do you use for your plants? The earth in this part of Tenerife is naturally volcanic, isn't it?

Alix: The earth here is quite good actually and full of minerals. It just needs an organic element which is brought by the compost that we add, and then a little bit of peat. With our mulching machine, when we prune trees and bushes, everything goes into the machine and then into the compost, except the large branches which become firewood. Our compost comes directly from the garden and is very powerful so the plants grow very quickly!

Mirror: Have you chosen any particular plants for this area of the garden?

Alix: Let's say I'm trying to create a continuity for the Gönpa gardens because they are a bit different from the others. There

will be the same plants as the other section of this garden although I'm going to introduce some new elements.

Mirror: In the gardens that have already been established, have you made any changes or run into any particular difficulties?

Alix: Much of the garden was designed to have trees that give shade quickly and now there's a lot of shade because the trees grew very fast and the garden was becoming a jungle! Recently we have spent a lot of time pruning them, removing many of the lower branches to let a little more light through. In this way, there will be shade in the hottest hours of the day but the morning sun and the afternoon sun will still come to the garden because the shade from the trees is higher up now. We had a lot of help from Hubert Kotowski with this work.

Then we have had some plants that are bringing too many problems and I have had to get rid of them. For instance, I had to remove most of the *opuntia* (prickly pear cactus), which had been planted in the Corona Garden on the right side of the Gönpa because they were always covered in this cochineal bug (*dactylopius coccus*). The cochineal is not indigenous to Tenerife but was introduced here to make dye for clothes for the bishops. In fact people still use the cochineal to do this natural dyeing process. In place of the *opuntia* we have planted *euphorbia* (Canary Island spurge) which are not prone to this bug.

The same insect was also infecting much of the *bourgainvillea* [the colorful

ornamental vines with pink, magenta, purple, red, and orange flowers! There was a lot of this *bourgainvillea* along the outer fence at the Gar – much of which had already been planted before we established the Gar – close to olive trees, orchid trees, and other types of trees and the cochineal bugs from the *bourgainvillea* got into the trees. Because of them we couldn't maintain that part of the garden and, in addition, the bugs also made quite a bad smell. So we got rid of a lot of the *bourgainvillea*, but not all. Now it will be easier to take care of them.

The garden is evolving and because of that we have to see how it can be maintained. If it's too much work and it's not adding any aesthetic aspects, we have to make changes.

Mirror: The garden here at the Gar is full of birds and in the morning you wake up to the wonderful sound of birdsong. Could you describe some of the wildlife that has come to the garden?

Alix: When we first came here, there were no birds, however, this kind of garden, which is a bit wild and informal with a wide variety of plants, has brought an enormous amount of life. Of course the birds are the most striking of the wildlife because they sing, particularly in springtime when they are making nests.

But I've also seen little hedgehogs that come and drink from the irrigation pipe at night and sometimes eat a little bit of the compost that we put out. Then we have a lot of bees that come for the rosemary, the lavender, and the *gaura* plants (beeblossoms) which are abundant and proliferating at the Gar. And once the summer starts the garden is full of butterflies, including some rare species that are rarely seen.

I think that one of the aims of a garden is to provide a habitat for animals, not only for humans. I read an article about birdsong and they say that it makes people happy and they relax when they hear birds chirping, especially in the morning. There is not only the sound of the birds, but you can see them coming and going in the gardens. We also have the wonderful hoopoe (*upupa*) bird coming here, a colorful bird with a crown of feathers. The first one came when I planted the grass, and now there are many. There are also many native Canary Island birds nesting in the gardens.

Mirror: The south of Tenerife where the Gar is situated is a very dry area and water is very precious. What is the situation with the water for the plants here at the Gar?

Alix: The water for the plants is very costly because we have been using the water from the town. At the moment we're using up the water from the swimming pool which has to be emptied in order to repair the surface of the pool. The water is pumped to the tank and we use it to water the garden. We will save some money like this for a few weeks because the bills for water are quite expensive.

Now we have an option to use recycled water because a source has recently opened nearby. Although it is a lot cheaper, my concern is that in addition to chlorine, they put a lot of hormones and chemicals into the recycled water. Surprisingly, plants can take the chlorine but hormones are different. We have around 150 fruit trees at the Gar and we would find hormones in the fruit! However it's much cheaper so most probably we're going to start using it.

The other option could be recycling the water from the Gar, however, this should have been considered long ago before the roads were made and the houses finished. Perhaps in the future we will be able to have a project for this, but it will be costly and a lot of work at this point. All the sweat, all the great effort we have put in to create the gardens might have been alleviated by more careful planning in the early years of the Gar.

Mirror: Finally, is there anything in particular that you would like to mention about the gardens?

Alix: People love to come here to the Gar, especially in winter, because when it's cold in Europe, here it's possible to be outside. And they can enjoy not only the colors, not only the birds, but also the scents of the garden.

I remember that Rinpoche loved flowers, and he loved when the flowers attracted animals. One time at Merigar he commented on the lavender growing there: "Oh, it's so wonderful. See how many butterflies there are!" The garden has become a wonderful habitat for animals and a place for the children, for everybody to enjoy. People like to walk and sit here and I often find people with their noses in the flowers.

I also think the garden is a possibility for the future, because if the Gar is going to open more and more to the exterior, the garden will certainly attract people. People would come because it's a beautiful garden and there are not many in this part of Tenerife.

It could also become a place to hold social events and possibly even outdoor cinema in the evenings in the summertime. So I think it's positive not only because it's a habitat for animals, but also because it's a possibility for our opening to the outside.

Mirror: Thank you, Alix. ©



Alix and the garden team in one of the holes dug by hand for planting a tree.



Deepening Yantra Yoga or How I Renewed an Old Love Affair with Yantra Yoga in 8 days

An 8 day course with Laura Evangelisti at Dzamling Gar

January 6–13, 2023

Naomi Zeitz

As an older person in age and also in the time I have been studying and practicing Yantra Yoga, as well as being involved in working with people with some limitations of age and/or flexibility and doing some training in the chair, maybe I have become a bit lazy in body, speech and mind, and I fell into an established comfortable pattern of not pushing too much. For example, I think it might have been 2 years since I really attempted the Vajra Wave in its totality. (It is still applied with my particular style.)

The course with Laura was an awakening for me, and I think not only for me. The feedback we received was that everyone was very, very pleased with the tone of the course, the material covered and also just the general warmth and camaraderie among the instructors and all the participants that was modeled by Laura in how she was teaching and guiding. It was a wonderful environment in which to learn, stretch limits (literally and figuratively) and practice together.

First of all, the physical presentation of the course was done in a circle, since Laura said she felt more comfortable in that kind of formation as opposed to being in the front and having everyone facing only to her. This way we all faced each other and this made for a much more open experience and lent itself to easier participation and sharing.

Practicing together in this way is something that everyone commented on; for instructors it is so wonderful to be able to practice together and create a kind of unison of movement that is thrilling for people who spend a lot of time teaching and correcting; also for participants to observe, participate, learn and feel the potential of knowing Yantra Yoga so well that there is no more thought or struggle with movement, but a flow and sensation of pleasure and relaxation from the smooth and precise execution of movements.

Laura's detailed, generous and kind explanations of movement and pranayama led us to be able to enter the experience and be with our own capacity and condition, and literally deepen our experience of the entirety of Yantra Yoga. We spent a lot of time on working with pranayamas and as Laura explained, this is really the heart and aim of the practice. We were all able to take time, to understand deeply and to truly enter this marvelous system of *trulkhor*.

Laura reminded us of the source of the teachings often referring to stories, experiences and the famous text of Vairocana, now called the the Yantra Yoga "bible". We were also fortunate to watch a very old video of Laura, Fabio and Adriano working with Rinpoche on the veranda of Merigar on the now famous book. This was very touching and delightful.

Instructors were called upon to lead some of the practices, so each day another instructor would participate in that way and would also receive some corrections and fine tuning in the process. Also instructors were encouraged to share observations, experiences, understandings, and also to ask questions and clarify doubts. And for the participants it was the same.

The group was around 20 people ages spanning from 16 years old to 80 years old. This also added to the richness of the course.

For a few evenings we had some meetings only for instructors where we discussed our experiences as instructors and also the future of Yantra Yoga. Hopefully there will be more communication regarding these topics to share with all the international instructors.

We hope to be able to offer more of these deepening courses with Laura at Dzamling Gar and we invite everyone, instructors, and those quite familiar and experienced in Yantra Yoga, to participate. The beautiful Gönpa offers a spacious and spectacular vista filled practice space and we look forward to seeing you all here to enjoy the beauty and uniqueness of Dzamling Gar. ©



Final Mandarava Ganapuja led by Sebastien Remy.

Mandarava Retreat

February 21–March 7, 2023
Dzamling Gar in collaboration
with Tashigar South

From February 21 to March 7, 2023 Dzamling Gar, in collaboration with Tashigar South, hosted the annual Mandarava retreat. February 21 we had our Losar celebration and all of those festivities, with especially delightful performances of a play called *Jakata Tales* directed by Lourdes Velaochaga Guinea and Khaita, with children and adults, each year always surpassing the last.

This year the Blue Gakyil of Dzamling Gar was wondering how to offer the best kind of retreat for the international Dzogchen Community. Fabio Andrico was not going to be on site at Dzamling Gar and Nina Robinson kindly agreed to come and participate in the retreat live in the Dzamling Gar. That was our base.

Then a flash came and we decided to do it together with Tashigar South by webcasting and Zoom, and that way we could have both Fabio and Nina together helping us with the practice, tsalungs and sogtig breathings, as have now become a tradition.

Little did we know the complex nature of what we had proposed. First of all there was the registration and distribution of the schedules and links. Sebastien Remy manifested a fantastic app that people could use to find all the practices, etc., from all time zones with their links. For some this proved to be very challenging at first, but then it seems things settled into functionality.



Nina Robinson.

Our wonderful project manager Anna Neyman really steered the ship very gracefully and effectively and enlisted the help of a wonderful array of karma yogis who kept the ship afloat.

There were two webcast channels and two zoom channels and concerns about time differences, replays and translation, etc., etc. The webcast teams from both places were heroic. In Dzamling Gar our webcast team is managed by Igor Tarnavskiy and Raul Barratini, with advisors Thinley Koblensky and Sebastien Remy.

In Tashigar South the webcast team was managed by Eduardo Gromaches and Erika Carello and we were told that Eduardo was up early every morning and made a journey across the Gar to the Gönpa to arrive in time for an early morning session with Fabio.

The sound in the Dzamling Gar Gönpa is also a great challenge and Pancho Company helped to manage that aspect that not only included the live participants' access

to good sound, but also the sound that had to be broadcasted.

The retreat was translated into Spanish, Italian, Russian and Chinese (for some sessions) and we are eternally grateful to all our translators.

The daily sessions in Dzamling Gar included an early morning replay on Zoom of the explanations and practice that happened in Tashigar South the day before with Fabio Andrico. Then an hour long webcasted teaching with Rinpoche, after a Mandarava practice skillfully led by Sebastien Remy and then a break. After lunch Nina came to the Gönpa and enchanted everyone with her stories, anecdotes and explanations of the tsalungs, sogtig and practice, and then sometimes, if there was time, the actual practice.

We also included our regular program of Yantra Yoga early morning, Vajra Dance and Khaita thuns as well.

So, as usual, the program was full and rich.

We had our annual lottery and auction, masterfully managed and led by Lena Dumcheva and her assistant auctioneer Tim Cabot.

All in all, after all is said and done, the retreat managed to be a success and very satisfying to many people, live and by webcast/zoom. We are not sure that this level of complexity will be attempted again, but one never knows in the Dzogchen Community. We are always up for a challenge.

And once again we thank everyone, Tashigar South, their Gakyil, all the people coordinating the programs and broadcasts and all the the people on the ground in Dzamling Gar, the Gakyil and everyone who made the retreat a success!



Kumar Kumari Teacher Training with Laura Evangelisti June 18–22, 2023.



New Kumar Kumari instructors from Left to right: Elerin Uibu, Sara Magnelli, Laura Evangelisti (Teacher), Magda Ourecka, Lourdes Velasquez, Gloriana Brenes and missing from the photo Alexandru Anton.



Two new Kumar Kumari instructors (left to right) Monika Marcik and Wojtek Torczynski.



Vajra Dance Instructors Meeting and Practice Retreat March 6-18, 2023 with Prima Mai and Adriana Dal Borgo at Dzamling Gar.



THE MIRROR

Newspaper of the International Dzogchen Community of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu

US Office: mirror@tsegyalgar.org • European Office: lizgranger.mirror@gmail.com • Russian Office: beawaketoday@gmail.com • Editorial Staff: Naomi Zeitz, USA • Liz Granger, Italy • Anastasia Eremenko, Russia Advisor: Adriano Clemente • International Publications Committee English Language Advisor: Liz Granger • Design & Layout: Thomas Eifler • Webmasters: Yuchen Namkhai and Luigi Ottaviani • Available at melong.com • Online Mirror: www.melong.com • All material © 2023 by The Mirror • Reprint by permission only • We reserve the right to edit all submissions.



Dzogchen Teachings with Yeshe Silvano Namkhai

Dear all,
We are happy to invite you to the Dzogchen Teachings retreat, which Yeshe Silvano Namkhai will hold in Merigar from the 12th to the 17th of May 2023. The retreat will begin on Friday the 12th with a session at 3 pm, and will end on Wednesday the 17th with the morning session.

From the 13th to the 16th there will be two teaching sessions a day, one in the morning and one in the early afternoon.

At this link you will find the detailed program of the teaching sessions and other planned activities: <https://www.merigar.it/en/courses-and-events/dzogchen-teachings-with-yeshe-silvano-namkhai/>

Please register as soon as possible, both if you plan to participate in person or if you want to follow online, to allow us to better organize the welcome and provide you with the best service. There are two different signup forms; please be careful to fill the one that fits your case, and answer all the questions. It is important for us to acquire the relevant information.

Recordings of the Teaching sessions will be available for members for a few days on the replay page of the webcast.

Thank you for your participation and collaboration, do not hesitate to contact us for any questions or clarifications you may need!

We are waiting for you in Merigar and online!

The Gakyil of Merigar

Schedule

Friday, May 12th

3 pm

The retreat starts

Short introductory speech welcoming the participants and thanking them, Yeshe Silvano Namkhai and the Namkhai Family

3:15 to to 4:30 pm

Teachings with Yeshe Silvano Namkhai in the Gönpa

5:30 to 6:30 pm

Khaita Joyful Dances, in the Gönpa

Saturday, May 13th

10 to 11:15 am

Teachings with Yeshe Silvano Namkhai in the Gönpa

11:45 to 12:45 am

Presentation of the Community and its activities, in the Gönpa

11:45 to 12:45 am

Practice of Yantra Yoga in the Mandala Hall and on the external platform

3 to 4:15 pm

Teachings with Yeshe Silvano Namkhai in the Gönpa

5 to 6:30 pm

Explanation of short ganapuja, in the Mandala Hall

5 to 6 pm

Practice of Vajra Dance, in the Gönpa

Sunday, May 14th

10 to 11:15 am

Teachings with Yeshe Silvano Namkhai in the Gönpa

11:45 to 12:45 am

Dance of the 12 A, in the Gönpa

11:45 to 12:45 am

Practice of Yantra Yoga in the Mandala Hall and on the external platform

3 to 4:15 pm

Teachings with Yeshe Silvano Namkhai in the Gönpa

5 to 6 pm Short Ganapuja in the Gönpa

Monday, May 15th

10 to 11:15 am

Teachings with Yeshe Silvano Namkhai in the Gönpa

11:45 to 12:45 am

Introduction to Yantra Yoga, in the Gönpa

11:45 to 12:45 am

Practice of Vajra Dance, in the Mandala Hall and on the external platform

3 to 4:15 pm

Teachings with Yeshe Silvano Namkhai in the Gönpa

5 to 6 pm,

Presentation and practice of Khaita Joyful Dances, in the Gönpa

5 to 6:15 pm,

Practice of Vajra Dance, in the Mandala Hall and on the external platform

7 pm

Evening together, with a buffet

Tuesday, May 16th

10 to 11:15 am

Teachings with Yeshe Silvano Namkhai in the Gönpa

11:45 to 12:45 am,

Practice of Contemplation, in the Gönpa

12 am to 1 pm

Practice of Yantra Yoga in the Mandala Hall and on the external platform

3 to 4:15 pm

Teachings with Yeshe Silvano Namkhai in the Gönpa

5 to 6:30 pm

Khaita Joyful Dances, in the Gönpa

5 to 6 pm

Practice of Vajra Dance, in the Mandala Hall and on the external practice

Wednesday, May 17th

10 to 11:15 am

Teachings with Yeshe Silvano Namkhai in the Gönpa

11:15 am

Conclusion of the retreat and thanks





Putting up the new prayer flags and authenticating the prayer flags and namkhas.

Update from Merigar West

Warm wishes for a Happy New Water Hare Year to you all!

We have just concluded the celebrations for Losar, Tibetan New Year. We prepared with purification practices, then we followed our Teacher's guidance by doing what Tibetan tradition calls for, namely a fire puja, Gutuk divination soup, and the ganapujas of the last day of the old year and the day of Losar. The old prayer flags were burned and the new ones authenticated and hung up. On Sunday February 26 Migmar Tsering gave a conference to point out the main astrological aspects that the New Year brings.

We know how precarious our world is; wars, natural and environmental disasters are unfortunately there for all to see. We look for comfort and reassurance in astrological predictions, but above all we take refuge in the Path and in the Teachings that our Teacher transmitted to us. We face

life by taking our responsibilities knowing what the real situation is and trying to do everything we can to alleviate our suffering and that of all beings. We are sure that this Water Hare year will be a special year for us; Yeshe Silvano Namkhai will soon give a retreat of Dzogchen Teachings at Merigar. Yeshe will be at Merigar, and we are extremely happy about this, and many practitioners, old and new, will be able to listen to his teachings all over the world, through the webcast. This is wonderful. It is truly a new beginning for our Community!

Now we are all overjoyed and busy organizing this event. At Merigar you can feel the atmosphere of a great event, many people have offered to help and get involved, and many have shown their eagerness to come and participate in person. Many are wondering what will happen, how the retreat will unfold...

We are not asking ourselves a lot of questions but are simply happy with what is taking place. The mere fact that it will happen is an extraordinary and significant fact for us that does not leave much space or need for questions. We have a wide, open outlook, we are aware that this is the most meaningful thing that could have happened to us as a spiritual community, and for this we thank the Master's compassion and our karma that has brought us here.

Warm greetings to all.
The Merigar Gakyil



Stories at the Museum

Letizia Pizzetti

During the winter, in the small municipal library of Arcidosso, a group of children accompanied by their parents meet to read short stories, classic fairy tales, and narratives from all over the world. Enchanted landscapes, fantastic places, and wonderful creatures come to life during those afternoon sessions. This initiative was proposed by the "Junior Book Club" run by Eleonora Alfieri and Samantha Antognoli. In early November we received a phone call from them asking: "Can you tell the children a story about Tibet?". There couldn't have been a better time! In those days the story of "The Adventures of Nyima, Dawa and the Little Yak" were about to be published, a story set in Tibet, full of fantastic creatures: yetis, dragons, and talking animals. The story, written by Laura Evangelisti and the Kumar Kumari Team, has a particular value as it is also a support for learning Kumar Kumari Yantra, the Yoga conceived by Master Namkhai Norbu, specifically for children between 5 and 12 years of age.

On December 8, the day of the inauguration of the "Pilgrimage along the Silk Road" and "Potentiality of the Elements" exhibitions, we met at the MACO, the Museum of Oriental Art and Culture, to visit the museum and write down some ideas. In the following days, the Kumar Kumari Team and the Junior Book Club set to work to define the event and set the date for the meeting with the young audience.

And so on 28 January we met at the Arcidosso Castle and from there, guided by Jacobella Gaetani, we visited the MACO. Jacobella was able to enthral the children by talking about Tibet, its history and its traditions, adding some fun facts that captured the attention of the young audience. We moved to the upper rooms to visit the Dynamic Space of the Elements exhibition, which featured works by artists from all over the world. We then went down to the multipurpose hall of the castle where Cristina Conticelli, illustrator of the book "The Adventures of Nyima, Dawa and the Little Yak" was waiting for us. Cristina has also been a "storyteller" for years, recounting fairy tales, myths, and legends in libraries, schools, and theatres.



The children gathered around her as she began: "In a distant country called Tibet, among the snow-capped peaks of the highest mountains in the world, there was a large hidden cave ...". The cadence of her voice, the pauses, the rhythms, the movements, the reference to the illustrations animated the story and enchanted the children who, at the end of the story, wanted to have a signed copy of the book.

To experience the sounds used in the fairy tale, Dina and Natasha Priymak, Michele Corrado and I led a short Kumar Kumari session. At the end of the session, we formed a circle and everyone, in their own way, shared their experience. Before saying goodbye, we made an appointment for the next story ... perhaps in the Merigar Library ... perhaps in some stage of The Silk Road! ©

*At the end of Yoga Holidays which this year will be held from 1 to 5 August at Merigar and which will have as its theme: "Possible paths. Paths of yoga and meditation at Merigar", there will be a day dedicated to children in which there will be an activity organized by Cristina Conticelli: "The Silk Road".

New Acquisitions for the Merigar Library

In the last few days, through a 'fortunate' coincidence, the Merigar Library has acquired a collection of texts of great importance especially regarding the Tibetan language section of the Ancient School (Nyingma). In fact, volumes belonging to four complete works of important Tibetan Masters from the lineage of Dūdjom Rinpoche have been recovered, in particular:

* 14 volumes belonging to the Opera Omnia of Dūdjom Rinpoche (1904–1987), which includes, by way of example only, the original Tibetan of the monumental work on the history and lineages of the Ancient School and Dzogchen translated into English by Gyurme Dorje with the collaboration of Matthew Kapstein and published by Wisdom under the title *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*.

* 19 volumes of the Complete Works of Dūdjom Lingpa (1835–1904), previous reincarnation of Dūdjom Rinpoche and a famous tertön.

* The Opera Omnia in four volumes of Dewai Dorje (1892–1940), known as Sera Khandro, a tertön very well known also for having been the Root Teacher of Chatral Rinpoche (1913–2015) and having exchanged teachings with Adzom Drugpa, of whom she was consort for a period.

* The Opera Omnia in six volumes of Dorje Thogme (1746–1797), an important tertön who opened the 'hidden land' of Pemakö, and built and lived in a hermitage there. The transmission of the teachings he rediscovered continued thanks to his yogini wife Dawo Wangmo.

They are works printed by the same publisher at the end of the 70s in India on the initiative of Gene Smith and the TBRC (today the BDRC, Buddhist Digital Resource Center). They are texts that we did not have in the Library and are by very important authors of the Ancient school. In fact we already have other works or partial copies by the same authors.

For the Western section, we acquired 49 volumes from *The Sacred Books of the East* collection, which contains English transla-



Giorgio Dallorto and Margherita Pansa, the librarian, with the new texts.

tions of Eastern religious texts, edited by Max Müller and originally published by Oxford University Press between 1879 and 1910. The collection now in the library incorporates sacred texts from Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism and Islam, and is an Indian reissue from the 1990s.

By chance, all these works were presented to the Library Merigar for a fee. We thought it was beneficial to acquire them for an ever greater enrichment of our heritage and we hope that you will send your donations to cover the expenses of our Library.

Please find below bank account details for donations. In the description you can indicate the "the LIBRARY project".

To obtain tax benefits in Italy, the reason for payment should be "Erogazione liberale ai fini istituzionali biblioteca" (Liberal donation for institutional library purposes).

Merigar Dzogchen Community
Loc. Merigar 58031 Arcidosso Grosseto
Italy

Bank:
INTESA SAN PAOLO SpA Arcidosso
branch – GR
C/C 3503
IT35E0306972163100000003503
BIC or SWIFT code: BCITITMM

You can also use PAYPAL
(https://www.paypal.com/donate/?cmd=_s-xclick&hosted_button_id=3WY5BDHPRHE96&source=url)

Finally, a few thanks, starting from Giorgio Dallorto who helped us to correctly evaluate the material and for having contributed with donations of works he purchased.

Furthermore, we would like to sincerely thank all those who, also in 2022, donated books to the Merigar library: Costantino Maria Albini, Luciano Limonta, Alessandra Livi, Mariateresa Miraglia, Luigi Vitello, Emilio Sarti, Peter Eisenegger, Sergio Quaranta, Max Leupin and ASIA. We thank the Merigar Study Group, the "Practicing together" online practice group and all donors for their financial support. ©

Preparing the Lungtas at Merigar East

Why do we make Lungtas at Merigar East?

Making the lungtas by hand is a long process. It takes about two months and a half and several people's contribution. But we still do it, every year, for about 5 years now. Why do we do it?

First, because preparing Lungtas is practice! It trains diligence, patience and generosity. The Lungta makers are constantly in contact with the colours of the elements and with the mantras, cultivating good intentions and wishes for the final users of the flags. With the lungtas we embellish the gar and support their function of liberating through seeing.

Second, because we are passionate about handmade and ecological processes. This makes sense for us, because spending time with the product, immersing in it artistically, enjoying the process is fulfilling and gives a special connection to the flags. This process attracts the attention of other people who make things by hand as a hobby and gives us an opportunity to tell a story: the Tibetan prayer flags are not just a decorative item. They talk about the elements, about astrology, about Tibetan symbolism and about our practice.

Third, because preparing Lungtas is a profitable activity for the gar. My friends couldn't believe it when I told them that the flags are really bringing us several thousands of euros every year. It's impressive, and for our budget is a great source of support! Thank you, community! Of course, in order to raise funds, we need to have karma yogis who are willing to do this, even just for a few weeks. We greatly appreciate people who can sew, as they can help even from their home, but also people who are good at marketing, at promoting our product and selling it online. If you can do anything to help, we would highly appreciate it!

How do we do it?

We start by cutting the colored cotton to measure. This year we exceptionally acquired an electric rotary cutter to make this phase (the longest of all) a bit quicker and more precise.

Then we do the screen printing in the Gönpa, until we cover the whole floor with flags. They are left to dry, then they are sorted following the traditional sequence



of colors, and readied for sewing. We have two sewing machines and some people have learned how to use them just for this occasion.

While doing this, we listen to recorded teachings, we recite or sing the mantra of the elements, khaita joyful Tibetan songs or sometimes just plain pop songs to keep the rhythm going.

No specific skills are needed, but you do develop patience doing this work!

We empower and hang hundreds of flags on the day of Losar (the Tibetan New Year, 21st of February this year) and in the following weeks. Join us next year for the Lungta project, either in person or at a distance.

Karma yoga and your donations are helping to keep the Gar going!

Awakening the wisdom of our own perfection: the Six Paramitas

In March we prepared a truly inspiring online course. Reflecting on our own perfection enables us to live our life within society in presence and awareness. This seminar, held between 13th and 19th of March was based on the explanations of the Six Perfections, also called the Six Paramitas.

We all have our own journey with beings defined as "others", sometimes with the intention of helping them in different situations. This altruistic aspiration is called Bodhichitta in action which is the manifestation of this the Six Paramitas (Six Perfections): Generosity, Morality, Patience, Perseverance, Meditative Stability and Discriminating Wisdom.

"Training in the Bodhicitta in action consists mainly in training gradually in the six Paramitas or 'perfections' [...] After first having understood well their basic principles and their subdivisions, we should put them into practice in order to integrate their fundamental sense within ourselves" (Chögyal Namkhai Norbu – The Precious Vase)

In this course participants engaged more deeply with the Six Paramitas, in 9 intensive sessions in one week, to discover how to bring these perfections into our lives right now.

We are also preparing for a hot but happy **summer** with the continuation of the Gönpa Renovation project, focused on finishing the painting of the ceiling. We are inviting artists and karma yogis to join us in another artistic summer camp on the wild shores of the Black Sea, from mid-July to mid-August. We will also dedicate time to the Vajra dance (beginning of July, with Zoli Cser) and to practicing contemplation, at the beginning of September, with Igor Berkhin. Follow our schedule on Dzogchen.ro and plan your trip to the sunny Gar in advance! ©



Losar and the Coming of Spring at Kunsangar North

Kunsangar North Gakyil

February was an eventful and busy month at the Northern gar. Despite the harsh winter weather, the snowy and sparsely populated gar prepared for Losar and the Mandarava practice retreat in advance.

A group of karma yogis printed lungtas so that they could be consecrated in time to be hung up all over the gar in the early days of Losar.

On February 13–19 we held an in-depth retreat on the practice of *mi yowa*, the second contemplation of Semde, with Santi Maha Sangha instructor Alexander Gomonov, for which we managed to create perfect conditions at the gar. Uniting with movement, participants practiced Dzogchen contemplation seriously and immersively onsite and online.

At the same time, on the eve of Losar, traditional activities and practices took place: purification practices, burning of



The Stupa of Perfect Victory at Kunsangar North.



Khaita Joyful Dances on the day of Losar.



Playing Liberation game at the Gar.

old lungtas, a workshop on making Tibetan an momos, followed by Losar with a festive ganapuja, games and dances.

From the first days of the new year of the Water Hare until March 7, there were many opportunities for visiting practitioners: in addition to practices and web-cast events from Dzamling Gar, Merigar West and Tashigar South, there were additional Mandarava practice thuns onsite and other practices arranged at the request of retreat participants.

At the same time, household chores and work at the gar are in full swing. The large dining room, which can accommodate up

to 150 people at a time, is undergoing a transformation. Thanks to donations from sponsors, we managed to purchase new kitchen equipment. We have also been given kitchen furniture and restaurant equipment. Now we are in the process of creating comfortable places to eat and relax.

There are lots of things to do and events to come. The long-awaited spring which is about to be announced by the song of the cuckoo will bring warmth and awakening.

The gar is waiting for you! See you in the dimension of practice and evolution! ©

Workshop on making Tibetan momos.



Living at Tashigar Norte

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Receive warm greetings from Tashigar Norte. We wish all of you a happy year of Rabbit 2023. Here we keep silently working, doing our best to move forward. Recently we received our second Vajra Brother from abroad interested in buying a house here. The outcome was positive, so Massimo Catalfo, as previously did Ralf Strehle, became part of PCTN family, a new Tashigar Norte's villager. We received them full of joy and we are thankful to them for having decided to contribute with Tashigar Norte's lives and projects. I invite all of you to visit our site tashigarnorteseecreta.wixsite.com/tashishop where you can find some opportunities to invest and become part of our family. Properties are very affordable, but especially comfortable and beautiful. The surroundings of the Gar are quiet, full of nature and life. We are running our strategy mainly towards a repopulation of the Gar, and with its' spiritual and communitarian life. With practitioners around, projects are easier to carry out.

I want to take the opportunity to call again all Tashigar Norte members who meet the requirements (at least 3 years as IDC member, and have received Direct Introduction) to send your CV if you want to be part of the Gakyil. It is a beautiful service to the Community, and a very powerful practice.

We are working on a program to do live courses and retreats, so stay tuned with us. Connectivity with Venezuela is improving little by little, citizens from Europe, UK, Russia, Mexico and Argentina are not required with visas. Also we recently signed a contract with a new internet provider that finally is resolving our online connectivity problems (150 Mbps) meaning we can broadcast events, following abroad Teachings and residents of the Gar can access the service to improve simple daily online routines.

All the best,
Rolando Carrasco
Yellow Gakyil
PCTN Associate

©



Bee house close to Rinpoche's House.



View of our Churuata.

Photos by Rolo Carrasco



Tashigar South Birthday Celebration.

Summer at Tashigar South

Yantra Yoga, Respira, Vajra Dance, Khaita, Public Activities, Losar, Mandarava Retreat, Santi Maha Sangha, Tibetan Medicine and more...

It is with great joy that we want to share a wonderful experience, which manifested itself in the summer 2023 in Tashigar South in a very auspicious way.

Breathing Cycle & Yoga in the Chair

From January 5, 2023, the activities for all audiences began in Tashigar Sur, led by Fabio Andrico. The first workshop on the Breathing Method was held from January 5 to 8. This was followed by a Breathe Method Teachers Training, from January 11 to 20. Then, from the 26th to the 29th of the same month, Fabio gave a Yoga in the Chair course in the afternoons, and in the mornings, instructor Leticia Recepter gave a Kumar Kumari course.

Awakening Wisdom

February 2023 saw the beginning of Awakening Wisdom, an event organized by ATIF and the International Dzogchen Community of South Tashigar, which included Full Presence with Oliver Leick, Yantra Yoga with Carolina Mingolla, Tibetan Medicine with Dr. Phuntsog Wangmo, Vajra and



Chair Yantra Yoga with Fabio Andrico.



Dr Phuntsog Wangmo teaching at the Awakening Wisdom event.



Oliver Leick teaching at the Awakening Wisdom event.

Khaita Dances, with South American Instructors Issa Cox, Nélide Saporiti and Alejandra Krasnogor.

The first course, Mindful Presence, open to all, was led by Oliver Leick, who gave us different tools to help relieve daily stress, emphasizing the fact of mindful presence

as the infallible antidote. And every afternoon we enjoyed Khaita led by Alejandra Krasnogor, and Vajra Dance led by Issa Cox and Nélide Saporiti, all local instructors.

On Saturday, February 4, a public presentation of Vajra and Khaita Dances took place in the central square of Tanti, under

the direction of the three local dance instructors. The presentation was attended by a large audience, who had the precious opportunity to get in touch with the teaching through the dances, as they were invited to dance in the Mandala.

Then, from February 8 to 11, two courses were held. In the morning, the 25



Vajra Dance in Tanti.

asado, which was attended by more than 60 people.

Mandarava Retreat

From February 22 to March 7 we had the precious opportunity to celebrate a Mandarava retreat with Fabio Andrico and Dr. Phuntsog in Tashigar South, and with



Khaita in Tanti.

Webinars

Two webinars were organized: the first one in alliance with the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Rosario, on Tibetan Medicine and Yantra Yoga, with the participation of Dr. Phuntsog Wangmo and Fabio Andrico. The second, in collaboration with the Pediatric Society of Rosario, on the top-



Making Khapse for Losar with Dr Phuntsog Wangmo.

spaces of Samantabhadra, and in the afternoon the 21 invocations of Tara, both guided by Oliver Leick.

From February 12 to 15, the course on Diet according to Tibetan Medicine was held by our beloved Dr. Phuntsog Wangmo. In the afternoons, a study group of the Dance of the Space of the Vajra dance, was organized, and authorized by Prima Mai. It took place on the 12th–14th, and was facilitated by Issa Cox, instructor of Vajra dances.

On February 16, we had a talk with Dr. Phuntsog and Fabio Andrico on the benefits of Yantra Yoga and Tibetan Medicine.

On February 16 and 17, Issa Cox, in collaboration with Nélica Saporiti, gave us a deepening course of the Vajra Dance that Benefits the Beings. On the 18th and 19th, Issa Cox guided a course of the Vajra Dance of Om Ah Hum.

Cycle of Cinema in Tashigar South

On Sunday afternoons, we shared together in the Gönpa of Tashigar South, the following films: “Great Fortune” with Chögyal Namkhai Norbu; “Unexpected Journey” with Fabio Andrico; “Journey to Kailash” with Chögyal Namkhai Norbu.

Celebration of Losar

We also celebrated Losar on February 19th, with fire puja and divination soup with the precious collaboration of Dr. Phuntsog in the kitchen, accompanied by Noe Riner and several practitioners. On the 21st we started at 6 am with the stars bath, followed by a short Mandarava practice, and a lunch with Momos and the Argentinean



Breathing Method with Fabio Andrico January 5–8, 2023.

Nina Robinson via online from Dzaming Gar. Every day, in two sessions, we had the explanation and practice of *kumbhaka*, *sogthig* and *tsalung* with Fabio. Dr. Phuntsog offered us a wonderful explanation on nutrition and behavior according to Tibetan Medicine.

In this opportunity we enjoyed the projection of videos of the precious teachings of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu about Mandarava retreats that he taught at different places of the world.

ic of Introduction to Tibetan Medicine for the Infant-Juvenile Stage, with the participation of Dr. Phuntsog Wangmo and Leticia Receptor, who spoke about Kumar Kumari.

During the development of all these activities we had a large participation of people from different Latin American countries: Colombia, Chile, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela, Mexico and Argentina, and as well from the United States, Canada, England, Spain, Italy, Austria, and Tibet.

The number of participants in person were more than 60, and via zoom it went up to 100 from various parts of the world, but in particular, from China. ©

Waiting for a Miracle

In this episode of his travels in Tibet in 1988, Raimondo Bultrini describes his time with Chögyal Namkhai Norbu at Nyaglagar, home to Rinpoche's root master, Changchub Dorje, and talks about the grandsons of this master.

Throughout the trip I theorize and practice many methods to experience these unknown dimensions. Nyaglagar seems like the perfect place to satisfy my desire to know. If Changchub Dorje is really that powerful, I tell myself, sooner or later he will manifest, perhaps in the form of a vision, or maybe, who knows, as a vibration. At night I hope he will appear in my sleep, during the day I search the sky looking for special signs. I find myself in that Western frame of mind that goes from secular disenchantment to doubt, from skepticism to waiting for a possible miracle.

Since, of course, nothing happens, I'm continually falling into a deep crisis where I question my whole self, the true meaning of travel, and what I'm looking for. When these moments arise I usually happen to find myself near Namkhal Norbu, who, after visits and teachings, spends all his free time reading his master's texts in a low voice, as if reciting them.

Sometimes I have the distinct feeling that Rinpoche can penetrate my thoughts. One day he raises his head, looking at me with a friendly smile, and asks, "What's up?". I don't have the courage to speak openly about everything: "I was thinking about the great fortune I have to be able to stay here" – I reply – "but I can't do anything to deserve it: I don't speak the language, I don't understand what these people are saying, I just sit here for hours without being able to communicate". Rinpoche continues reading his book and jokingly declares the subject closed, freeing me from the weight of thoughts that I can no longer control: "Those who are fortunate have absolutely nothing to do," he says.

A few days later, overwhelmed by this anxiety again, after hours and hours of solitude and silence, I think about negating all of my previous fantasies and theories on the wisdom of oriental philosophies, all my self-convictions on the power of Buddhist divinities, on the principles of the energy of yoga, on the Teachings, on the teacher. After all, I suppose that the familiar figure of Christ, as an example of a compassionate man, is more than enough to satisfy all my spiritual needs.

The more I meditate on this, the more I feel a kind of pride in the uniqueness of the Christian message, even in these mountains where the figure of Jesus is almost unknown. Sitting on my carpet with a cup of tea and gazing into the valley where the sky alternates rain and clear spells, I suddenly hear Rinpoche's voice: "What are you meditating on?" he asks.

Once again I feel practically naked, discovered in my innermost thoughts. It seems impossible to me that he can read them like an open book, but this is the immediate feeling I have. I have never experienced it before and it is precise, clear-cut, unmistakable.

I don't answer immediately, in the embarrassment and surprise in which I find myself. "I was reflecting on pride, – I limit myself to saying, awkwardly hiding everything else – thoughts come one after the other. It is easy to get carried away by what passes through the mind".

"Pride – Rinpoche tells me – when it is recognized as the origin of negative emotions, can be self-liberated, dissolving the tension that is its consequence. Because when pride, like jealousy, envy, anger and any other passion, is not governed by presence, it hinders knowledge of the true nature of things."

"But when thoughts disturb you, like flies you can't chase away – I insist, now pretending that this was really the only object of my reflections – how can you have this presence?"

"Where do thoughts come from? And where do they go? Try to look..."

"I have no idea, really. I don't think they come from a specific place."

"It's not enough to analyze, you have to experience in practice. Only after that

can you say: ah, here, I found them, or no, I didn't find anything"

I finish my tea and go up to the cave where Changchub Dorje taught and where I discovered the special red earth with which he made *tsatsas* (led. stamped clay figures) and medicines. I stop in front of a throne made of rock used by the master during his teachings and try to empty my mind, letting it simply follow the rhythm of my breathing.

I know theoretically that the rule of good meditation is to observe thoughts as they pass, not to dismiss them. They are like birds that leave no trace in the sky, and there is no need to follow them or stop to look at them. The Master said to observe the point where they arise and where they disappear, but I don't even notice the moment where one thought ends and another begins. I have to concentrate better. Ah, a new thought comes to my mind, and here's another and another. I haven't the faintest idea where they come from, but I feel much more relaxed.

Unfortunately the feeling does not last for long. In some corner of my mind there is a recurring thought, the wish to receive a sign from this place that everyone says is magical and full of power.

It is an idea that grows and comes before all others. "I don't have to make the situation worse – I tell myself – I have to make it go away". But it doesn't go away and even when I have the impression that I have succeeded, after a while it reappears. Then I begin to sing the mantra that Changchub Dorje himself transmitted to Namkhai Norbu, the Song of the Vajra, that was taught to the monks of Galen.

I concentrate my senses only on the vibrations that the sound produces inside my body, and the tensions dissolve in internal space, bringing my mind into a state of stillness in which everything seems to remain suspended, motionless. Suddenly, like a fish leaping out of the water, comes a thought, a sound. It passes, and for an instant it does not disturb the peace of this state. It is the sensation of a moment, the fleeting experience of something that could and should last throughout every moment.

I walk back past Palden's house; he is the youngest of Changchub Dorje's grandsons.

The living area is on the second floor of the building where a large temple which has remained almost intact is located. I climb the wooden staircase to reach an open gallery with a single large room where I find Namkhai Norbu together with Sonam Palmo, Phuntsog, and many members of the Nyaglagar lama's family.

Mikyod's death

It is lunch time and we are seated behind the low painted benches where the food offerings are placed. There are many *thangkas* hanging on the walls, some of which certainly depict the master. One in particular is striking for its beauty. The founder of Nyaglagar is depicted as a dancing yogi, and beams of colored light of hypnotic intensity radiate from his body. Underneath is an object that looks like a paper lampshade, but is actually a cylinder that continuously rotates without any mechanism. Simply with a small initial push it is able to take advantage for a long time of the right inclination and the speed acquired. It is a device that is used to rotate the mantras written inside, and hence to make the "wheel" of the Teaching move symbolically forward.

It is the same principle as the small prayer wheels with the mantra OM MANI PADME HUM that the Tibetans hold in their hands and rotate clockwise for hours and hours, or the very large ones in the temples that are also moved by the faithful. The significance is the same as that of the prayer flags that are exposed to the wind to offer the benefit of sacred words to spread in every direction through the most mobile element of creation.

The food in Palden's house is plentiful, with plenty of almost melt-in-your-mouth dried meat. I begin to recognize the best bits so that I avoid cutting the ones I can't chew. The meat here is softer than in Galen because we are at a lower altitude and the climate is not so dry. The taste is also better, but it doesn't keep as long.

I realize that with this diet it is almost impossible to eat distractedly, forgetting, for example, that you are feeding on an animal. The strip of meat is as hard as stone and on contact with saliva softens and releases the animal's blood. It's a sensation of heat, of tense nerves, of life flowing back into that piece of yak. Tibetans mentally recite a mantra for the benefit of the being that is feeding them and believe that the right intention, authenticated by the ap-

» continued on the following page



La cerimonia nel villaggio

DI LÀ DAL FIUME YANGTSE TRA I LAMA DEI LAMA

Distrutti negli anni della Rivoluzione culturale, molti luoghi sacri, quali gli "stupa", sono stati ricostruiti. Lama Namkhai Norbu ne ha appena consacrati un certo numero e ora esce in abito da cerimonia dal tempio di Nyag-la-gar, un villaggio della regione autonoma del Tibet oltre il fiume Yangtse, dove nessun occidentale può entrare a meno che non abbia qualche permesso speciale. Il villaggio di Nyag-la-gar fu fondato nel secolo

scorso dal lama Changchub Dorje, che fu maestro di Namkhai Norbu e visse, secondo i suoi discepoli, quasi 150 anni. Proprio per la venerazione di cui godono i lama in Tibet, la religione buddista sul "tetto del mondo" viene chiamata lamismo. Come Namkhai Norbu, in generale, questi uomini vengono considerati reincarnazioni di maestri del passato, giudicati in grado di scegliere il luogo ed il corpo per la loro rinascita come Bodhisattva, esseri che dedicano la loro vita agli altri. Non sono molti i lama riconosciuti ufficialmente attraverso gli oracoli ed i sogni miracolosi, ma questa qualifica viene attribuita anche a monaci anziani e rispettati

Chogyal Namkhai Norbu wearing a Padmasambhava mantle that belonged to Changchub Dorje assisted by Po Jo. Originally published in *Il Venerdì di Repubblica*, an Italian newspaper magazine.

» continued from previous page

propriate mantra, will produce a spiritual cause for its next, better rebirth.

During lunch, as a sign of great respect, the “capala”, the skullcap of the skull of Mikyod, the son of the master killed by the Chinese, is brought to Namkhai Norbu. Rinpoche turns it over in his hands and translates the story that the old monks tell him. Mikyod, who lived in a nearby village, was to be taken by the military and tried as a counter-revolutionary. But he didn't want to follow them to go into a concentration camp or prison, and so he ran away towards the forest chased by the Chinese who started shooting at him without managing to hit him. However, all of a sudden Mikyod decided to stop; he sat down, took off all the protection cords from around his neck and was killed.

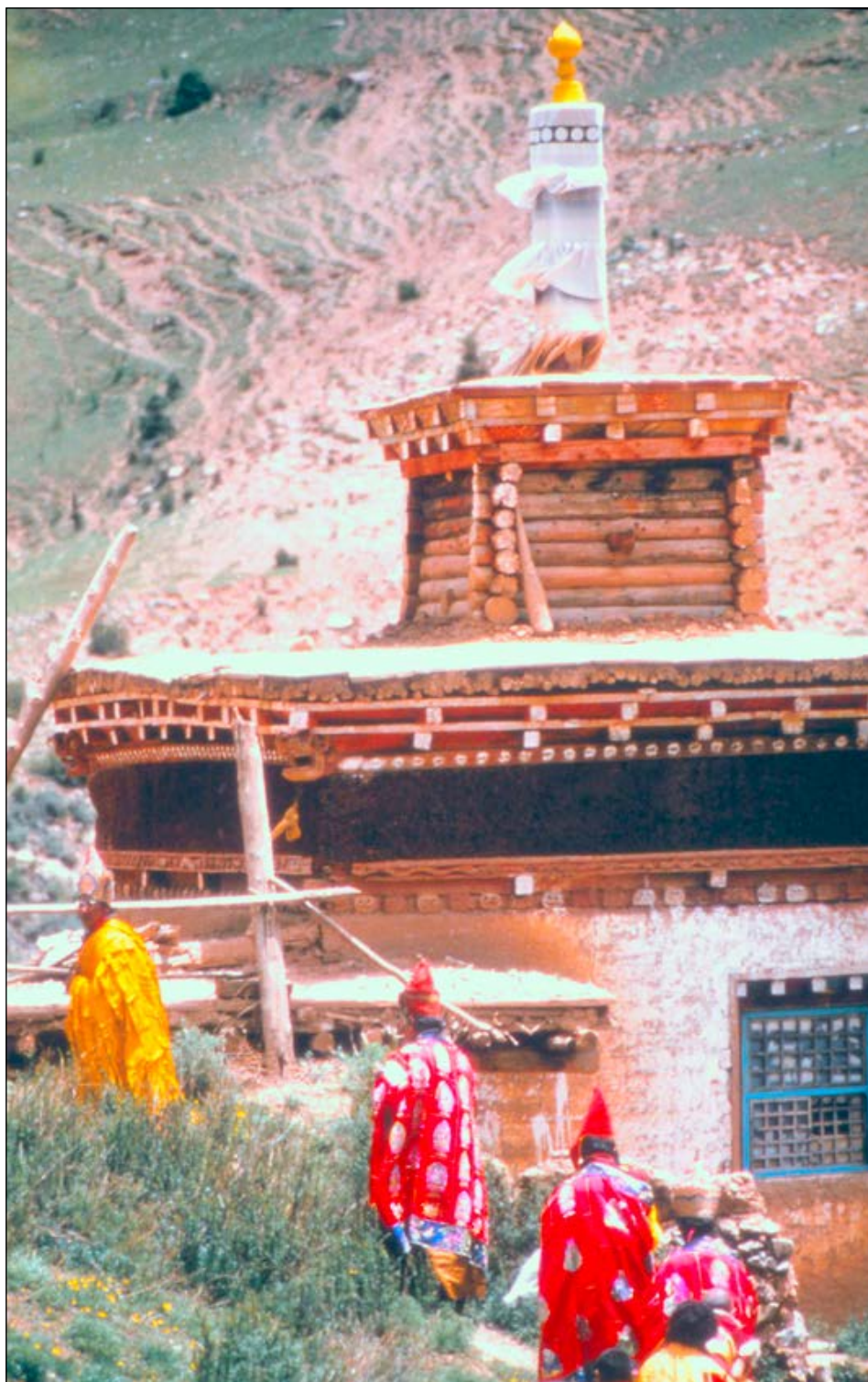
The revolutionaries arrived at Nyaglagar from Qamdo, they recount, but the village was too distant and tiring to reach, even on horseback. For this reason, only a few came and left almost immediately, without completing the work of destruction, as had happened almost everywhere around. They limited themselves to knocking down the tops of the *chortens* while leaving the foundations intact, to burning a few *thangkas* and the few books of Teaching left in the monasteries and homes. Most of the manuscripts were actually hidden in the nearby caves.

Just above Palden's house is one of the libraries with hundreds of texts piled on top of each other. There are also the teachings of Changchub Dorje transcribed by Namkhai Norbu more than thirty years ago.

We are invited to go up to a terrace where a large window frescoed with figures of masters sends beams of light into the temple. On the wall of an almost completely dark room figures of skeletons and large wild animals dance. It must be the room for the *chöd*, the ritual that is also practiced in cemeteries. I observe the macabre figures of the dance and think that basically every corner of this village, every moment spent here seems to impose a reflection on the constant presence of death.

Lama Karwang

The grandchildren of the founder of Nyaglagar give Rinpoche many writings from the library, among which are some small precious notebooks. They contain the advice that many lamas and yogis received from Changchub Dorje on how to



Rinpoche, Palden, Changchub Dorje's youngest son, and Po Jo.

improve their practice and explain how to learn, develop and stabilize contemplation.

A master knows precisely when a student is ready to take a certain step in his or her practice, even if there are apparently no signs of spiritual attainment. Changchub Dorje's eldest grandson is Lama Karwang. Despite the relative power that comes from being the spiritual leader of the village, I see a simple man who is so si-

lent and unobtrusive that he almost seems to walk on tiptoes.

Observing him, it doesn't immediately occur to me that this simplicity could be the fruit of long inner practice. Karwang gives me a photograph of himself, very small, in which he sits cross-legged in a meadow, and he asks for one of me. I look at his photo for a long time, just as I study his movements during his repeated visits

to our room, or as we stroll through the dusty streets of the village.

Perhaps I would like to discover the secret of his moving so lightly, without ever making a sudden, awkward movement, without an overly loud tone of voice. His face shows no anxiety or tension. He is serious, or else cheerful, but never worried or angry. Deep down, he seems to have the reactions of a child.

With an amused expression he really likes listening to my readings of the phonetic transcriptions of mantras. He often calls his brothers to witness the little marvel of those foreign signs that correspond to their alphabet, and he asks me to repeat them several times. He seems happy to hear me speaking Tibetan, and he doesn't understand why, in addition to reading mantras, I don't also learn to converse.

Another reason for regret is for not having been able to commit myself to studying this language. I'm sure Karwang would have a lot to teach me, and I hope that one day, if circumstances permit, he will be able to come to the West. Who knows if he could maintain the same seraphic calm when faced with the bureaucracy and smog, the clock and the computer?

According to Rinpoche, Karwang's value also lies in his doctrinal and spiritual knowledge. The young lama has written many texts that seem to demonstrate a high degree of knowledge. It is not by chance that he is the most respected and esteemed of Changchub Dorje's grandchildren. This is an acknowledgment which acquires greater value if we consider the uncommon qualities of the other grandchildren. In fact, they all have a truly rare quality of humanity and congeniality, they joke with everyone and are surrounded at all times by crowds of children who obviously love to play with them.

The Grandsons of the Master

The youngest, Palden, is 25 years old, with a broad face and robust build. My fondness for him is linked to a gesture that I had never seen in China or even in Tibet: I see him holding hands with his young wife. It may seem strange that something so normal affects me so much, but here I miss this expression of feelings of love that is so common in the West, despite the great gentleness and spontaneous affection of the Tibetans.

The other grandson, the second in age, is Po Jo, the son of Mikyod. He is about thirty years old, thin, with round eyes that are

never still and a slightly receding chin. His appearance becomes very funny when he wears a round wool hat that accentuates the marked features of his face. His house is perhaps the busiest during our stay, because it is here that Namkhai Norbu gives teaching to the people of the village.

Not everyone manages to get inside because the room is not large enough, with the two corners for the carpets taken up as usual by the benches for offerings and food, the wooden columns in the middle dividing up the space even more, and the upper



Monks from Changchub Dorje's monastery at Nyaglagar and hermits living in the caves around welcoming Rinpoche.

area enclosed by large balconies where a bit of everything is stored. Pride of place goes to the altar, where many photographs are set out, including those of Namkhai Norbu and his son Yeshi, evidently sent by post years earlier, and thangkas and sacred images, especially of Changchub Dorje.

Surprisingly, tucked into a corner, I discover a large Chinese stereo radio. It is the only house in all of eastern Tibet where I have seen something like this. It is certainly not strange, because the towns that are inhabited by many Chinese are just a two-day ride away. But the fact remains that in my bucolic vision of Tibet these objects, including the watches that some khampas wear on their wrists, and even the grandsons of Changchub Dorje, seem to belong to another world.

Mikyod's son is clearly in love with Phuntsog and spends many hours in our room courting her, unsuccessfully as far as

I understand. For her – and consequently also for me and Sonam Palmo – Po Jo always brings candies, sweets and sometimes toasted barley seeds. He woos her by telling stories that I can't understand, but which are definitely funny because the two women laugh a lot together.

It must be said that Phuntsog and Sonam Palmo don't need to listen to funny stories to be in a happy mood. Except for moments of emotion for some particular situation, mother and daughter often joke around, and their relationship is like that of two teenage friends. They always walk hand in hand, in perfect harmony, so much so that in Chengdu I didn't realize at all that I had traveled for many days together with Phuntsog's real mother, with whom my young traveling companion had a much more formal relationship.

Po Jo immediately falls in love with this girl, and is ready to offer her his house, one of the most beautiful in the village, his stereo radio and anything else she could wish for. But Phuntsog doesn't seem at all interested in getting married, and what's more she doesn't like Nyaglagar very much. She prefers Galen, and can't wait to go back. So the young lay lama has to content himself with joking with her, and put up with the candid irony of Sonam Palmo. ©

The Time of Mourning: Passing through Grief

Luigi Vitiello

According to Freud, the loss of a person or something we love – a death, a separation, a departure, a theft – not only takes away someone or something dear to us, but also that part of us which is related to the object of our lost love. Thus it is not only the loss of another person or object but also of a significant part of ourselves. Mourning (*lutto* in Italian, from the Latin *lugere*, to cry) is the emotional reaction that this loss brings, the pain that also inflicts trauma on the vital energy.

The first important point to understand is that separations and mourning are part of life, just as much as other emotionally significant events, such as love. We might even say that they are a consequence of love, because when we are involved in a love relationship we also take on the risk of suffering that its loss entails.

Mourning is the process through which we come to accept the definitive disappearance of what or who we have loved, and to consciously separate ourselves from it. It's also important to understand that acceptance is not the same as resignation. It's neither a return to a readjusted "before" nor a passive closing off. On the contrary, it is often an impetus towards a responsive transformation of our existence.

Separation from the object of lost love, what is more, does not mean one cancels the memory of it; on the contrary, it may remain as an important fact that is impossible to cancel. It is rather a temporal relocation of experiences, the transition towards a non-paralysing nostalgia, but makes space for a return of the vital force to the present moment.

This process involves three aspects: memory, pain and time. After an initial moment of emotional numbness, the awareness of our loss rushes back with a painful flood of memories. This is the worst phase, the most difficult, in which it is particularly important to find good emotional and motivational support.



The flow of memories generally does not follow a linear pattern: there are moments of apparent detachment into which, all of a sudden, poignant and heart-rending images may erupt. We cannot predict how long this intense resurgence of memories, with their emotional baggage of suffering, will last; however, if we manage not to establish pathological defense mechanisms, with time they tend to become less frequent and less intense.

Those popular traditions that required mourners to wear external signs of mourning for a time ranging from one to three years, depending on their relationship with the deceased, had understood the average time needed to overcome the loss.

When faced with serious loss, however, there may be some pathological responses that we can identify, above all inconsolable distress and obsessive denial. In the first case, the depressive reaction is prolonged in an unlimited way and becomes chronic in what is defined as the melancholic stagnation of mourning, a condition that begins to dominate one's life. The person's emotional life stops and is frozen around the memory of someone who is no longer there and who they obsessively want to keep.

This state can have different degrees of intensity, often accompanied by ritual behavior, such as preserving unchanged over a long period those spaces where the deceased had lived.

In other cases we can observe a more or less conscious refusal to open up again to the pleasant aspects of life, as if this "guilty" coming out of mourning were an abandonment of the loved one, the betrayal of his or her memory.

Obsessive denial, on the other hand, consists in rejecting the pain that every loss inevitably entails. The person does not want to go through the time of mourning and the suffering it entails and throws him or herself into a flurry of activities to fill the void that has been left. This is a very different condition from the reaction that follows a full expression of loss, because it leaves no space for pain, devalues its meaning and worth, or even denies its existence.

In both reactions, the process of separation from the lost object of love, that can only come about from consciously working with one's pain, is blocked. It is important to remember that separation from someone who dies, from someone who has moved away, or from something that has been lost is not the annulment of his/her/its memory, of which there will always be a trace, just as a scar remains on wounded flesh which might be just visible, or deep and sometimes still painful according to the condition of each person and the extent of the wound.

Hence the path of mourning is also the process of re-appropriating that part of oneself that has been lost, together with those who have disappeared, or a place or a job that one has had to leave. Each phase of growth, each evolutionary step (leaving the womb, giving up the breast, leaving the parental home and so on) calls for a moment of separation, more or less painful, that requires time and strength to deal with the pain. It begins with sobbing, tears, with nostalgia, with nurturing memories, then evolves into a gradual distancing, a letting-go of what was and is no longer, but which can continue to live in our wealth of memories, in shared and lasting experiences. Pain, if accepted, always teaches us something.

What can help us in this work? Time is an indispensable factor, but it is often not enough by itself. The support of close loved ones is certainly another important element, although often not sufficient. Working with serious mourning requires the ability to deal with serious pain and this is never easy for those who are not prepared for it or are too emotionally involved. Therefore targeted therapeutic work may be necessary.

Died – Asem, Abdel Hamed Mohamed Asem El Nashar

Husband of Elisabeth Crouzet

Our Vajra sister, Elisabeth Crouzet, lost her beloved husband, Asem, who died in hospital on Wednesday morning, 22 February 2023, at 4 am. He was an active member in the Dzogchen Community in the early years of the Community, creating the newspaper "The Mirror" after meeting Chögyal Namkhai Norbu in 1986.

Elisabeth recalls that Asem met Chögyal Namkhai Norbu at a retreat in Greece in December 1986 where he also met Elisabeth. Although Asem had a Muslim upbringing, he was very respectful of others and their beliefs.

In December 1989 Asem came to Merigar and after just a few days presented his idea of creating a newspaper for the Dzogchen



Community to Rinpoche. When the layout had been finished and the very first issue of The Mirror was ready for printing, Asem and Elisabeth went to Naples to show Rinpoche and get his approval in order to go ahead. Rinpoche wasn't able to see them but on the phone he asked if they thought it looked good. Asem replied that it was okay for him and Rinpoche said, "Okay. That's

fine. You can print it!" He had such faith in Asem and all those working with him!

The first issue of The Mirror appeared in March 1990 and for the early issues of The Mirror Asem worked with Raimondo Bultrini, John Shane, Christiana De Falco and many others. In those early years of producing the newspaper, The Mirror was produced in the office next to what is now the Mandala Hall, where Rinpoche was starting to set down and teach the Dance of the Vajra.

In his later years Asem and Elisabeth lived in the countryside in France. ©

>> continued on the following page

In addition to time and external support, the awareness of the distressed person and his or her view of life are fundamental in this process. For those with a religious faith, this can be a comfort: it helps to believe that one's suffering has a higher value; that what happens, however painful, is part of a divine plan. In a non-theistic view such as that of Buddhist philosophy, awareness of the impermanence of everything is central, always keeping in mind that everything that has come together, starting from matter to human relationships, is destined to fall apart. It's just a matter of time.

A more complete awareness of impermanence can be developed through meditation practice, although I don't know how much it is able to immunize us from the suffering that comes from losing our deepest attachments. It will certainly help us not to be taken by surprise and will offer us tools to work through pain without being crushed by it.

In a society that seems to promise the elimination of all suffering and claims the right to well-being without disturbance, there is an increasing attempt to exorcise the idea of death and to remove the inevitability of pain from our lives, with the effect of making us unprepared for losses, and wanting to minimize the time of mourning. In this context, it becomes even more important to restore an awareness of one's own fragility, the space for listening to oneself, and the search for a path of knowledge that can guide us when the pain of loss enters our lives.

A final aspect to consider is that defined as anticipatory mourning, by which we mean the emotional response in the face of approaching death in a terminal illness. Although no one can reasonably think that life goes on indefinitely, most of us tend to dismiss the idea of our own death as a real event, or at least to shift it towards the illusion of an abstract future. However, this would open up a discussion that deserves to be treated separately. ©

Minimal bibliography

- Bormolini, G.: *Accompagnatori e accompagnati* – Ed. Messaggero 2020
- Felaco, R. & D'anselmo, F.: *Amare in assenza* – Kaizen 2016
- Frankl, V.: *Luomo in cerca di senso* – Franco Angeli 2017
- Freud, S.: *L'elaborazione del lutto* – BUR 2013
- Jäger, W.: *L'essenza della vita* – La Parola 2007
- Namkhai, N.: *Birth, Life and Death* – Shang Shung 2007
- Recalcati, M.: *La luce delle stelle morte* – Feltrinelli 2022

Luigi Vitiello

He has been a student of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu since 1977 and trained as a Yantra Yoga and Meditation teacher with him. He is a doctor and psychotherapist and holds a Masters degree in Spiritual Accompaniment in sickness and dying. He was head of the Tibetan Medicine section of the Shang Shung International Institute of Tibetan Studies, of which he later served as director. He is the author of various articles on Tibetan medicine and psychotherapy and holds seminars and courses on these topics, on meditation and on aspects relating to the end of life according to the view of Vajrayana Buddhism and Western psychology. He lives between Naples and Arcidosso.

A Few Words About Asem

John Shane

I always found Asem to be a true gentleman in the original sense of the English expression: he was both very gentle and very honorable.

When Merigar was still in its formative stages and the facilities we take for granted today were not there, he provided an invaluable service to the Community when he brought his considerable talents and experience as a newspaperman to bear on the project of starting to produce – on a remote mountainside in rural Italy – a regular printed newspaper that would carry information about Rinpoche’s activities, transcriptions of his teachings, reports on retreats, and personal stories, that would be mailed out around the world from the local Post Office.

Like many others in the Community, I had skills as a writer which enabled me to serve as one of the original editors, editing and translating Rinpoche’s teachings, and producing my own articles for the paper, but without Asem’s organizational skills and what we can call his ‘diplomatic subtlety’, ‘The Mirror’ newspaper project would never have got off the ground, and, even if it had got started, without him it would not have continued.

There were many obstacles of different types that the project had to overcome, and Asem’s warm and friendly presence, his flexible intelligence, his patience, and his ability to cheerfully persevere when others might have given up made all the difference between the success and failure of what we were trying to do together.

He was very good at something that Rinpoche was always asking us all to do, but which was present in many of us more rarely than one might have hoped: collaborating. When it was his moment to lead, he led by example. When it was his moment to follow, he followed with good grace.

Asem had behind him in his life a history of considerable professional accomplishments, but he was always modest and never arrogant.

His wonderful sense of humor that made him such fun both to work with and to hang out with, gave him the ability to joke about everything, including – dare I say it? – himself and his appearance.

Asem

Raimondo Bultrini

At the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, Catholic Italy had just begun to experience the flow of migrants from the south and east and, at almost every social level, people were still wary of those who were different from themselves. Even in the Dzogchen Community it wasn’t usual to meet practitioners of non-Caucasian ethnic groups, obviously not due to deliberate exclusion, but I believe that Asem was the first Arabic speaking Vajra brother to come to Merigar. Born Abdel Hamed Mohamed Asem El Nashar, he had followed his French companion, Elisabeth, who had moved to Italy some time earlier to follow our Teacher and his teachings, and together they continued a spiritual journey that has always found them committed to supporting the sangha in any way possible.

As happened in the rest of Italian society with the difficult but beneficial integration of the newcomers, the contribution of foreigners to the Merigar Dzogchen Community was crucial in establishing what has become, today, a worldwide network in continual interaction, also thanks to the media (today digital), such as The Mirror, social networks and Norbunet messaging. It was at the beginning of this process that Asem’s initiative and creativity helped plant and nurture

.....

All these years later I still remember the way he used to introduce himself to my young daughter Jessie and her English-speaking friends when they came into ‘The Mirror’ office.

He would see the children come to the door, and then he would point to his face and say, in English, ‘I am mouse...!’

The little girls and boys would laugh, and say ‘No...! You’re not...! You’re not...! You’re Asem..!’

But then Asem would point to his face again and wriggle his mustache so that it jumped up and down under his nose, as he called out, ‘Mouse...! Mouse...! You see, I am mouse...! Mouse...! *Mouse-tache*...!’

As you can imagine, I’m sure, the repetition of this game that he delighted so much in playing would always produce more and more laughter in the room.

Somehow, with his kindness good humor, Asem generated among the early

a seed that has proven to be resistant to the obstacles encountered along the way. Asem directly proposed the creation of The Mirror to Rinpoche and the Master immediately understood its potential as a tool for communication and deepening the teachings and for exchanging the experiences of individuals and the Gars themselves.

Three decades later, even though the details escape me, I can still vividly remember the enthusiasm with which Asem tried to convince us all of the importance of communication, without frontiers, between centers and practitioners. I recall that at that time there was no Internet and the first issues of The Mirror – as was already the case in Italy with the Merigar Letter – had to be sent around the world at a high cost. But that wasn’t the only obstacle. Even if in principle we all agreed with Asem on the need to communicate among us practitioners from many countries, the costs were small compared to the challenge of writing, having others write, the layout, printing and distribution.

If The Mirror, from paper to its digital form, is still alive and read on different continents, much is due to the energy and intelligence of Asem, supported at every step by Elisabeth and other practitioners who then created the complex organizational structure of a newspaper.

My heartfelt condolences go to Elizabeth Crouzet, united in the memory of many happy days and evenings spent together with dear Asem. ©

.....

team of ‘The Mirror’ a sense that all the difficult things we were going to have to face to create a newspaper with the very minimal resources and equipment that we had available to us at the time were a game that we would be able to easily and gracefully accomplish – if we only dared to imagine the outcome we wanted to achieve and then gave it our best shot.

Asem might have joked to the ‘Bambini di Merigar’ in those early days of the Gar that his mouse-tache resembled a mouse, but in the way that he lived he was really more like a friendly lion – fearless and ready to take on any challenge, yes – but also always kind and loving towards all around him.

Signs, it seems to me, if I may be permitted to say so, of both his naturally good nature and of the positive results of his understanding of the teachings that he received from Norbu Rinpoche. ©

Glòria Pinsach Coromina

(Figueres 30/10/1973 –
Barcelona 19/2/2023)

Anna Diogène
Marc Beneria Surkin

Gloria was born in Figueres, Girona (Spain) and studied piano at the Conservatory of Barcelona where she completed the Superior Music Degree under the prestigious pianist Ramón Coll. At the same time, she also studied Anthropology and Art History at University of Barcelona. In 2005, she met Chögyal Namkhai Norbu during the first Retreat in Barcelona and became a very active student, collaborator and then instructor in the Dzogchen Community. She had begun to practice yoga in 1993 and was authorized by Rinpoche as a Yantra Yoga instructor in 2010 and then was authorized in the second level in 2014. She taught Yantra Yoga and *Respira* in Barcelona, around Spain, internationally and online. She was a devoted and committed practitioner and mother.

Gloria, marvelous woman, reserved, free, discrete and strong, lighthearted, and determined, you had a luminous smile and a profound gaze directed towards the horizon, aimed at infinity.

Professional pianist, surrounded by youngsters and children, your students were pleased by how you happily guided them toward their creativity, offering them your dear attention, and musical and vital advice.

A Yantra Yoga instructor with a didactic capacity beyond the norm. You listened with attention to the entire group and saw in each one of us a profoundly connected whole. Demanding and precise with your instructions given with warmth, proximity, and tenderness you guided us to gain confidence on our path.

Gloria, you are a precious woman, an unconditional friend and sister, a daughter and mother of infinite generosity and dedication. You transmit love in a delicate way, with compassion, kindness and courage.

Unfortunately, your hereditary sickness took hold of you and although you fought it fearlessly for several years, until it consumed and took you far too young... In your



final weeks and days, we all witnessed the best part of you, you showed the signs of a serious practitioner, facing death fearlessly and even lightheartedly. You were lucid, loving, open, charming, and showing clarity... In the end, you asked us if there were any “buts”, and we responded, “no.” You affirmed then, “If there are no “buts” then that’s it!” and you said goodbye to us, adding, “I don’t want anyone to cry for me. I want you to be happy and thankful.”

You have gone how you lived, with coherence and freshness, with simplicity and profundity, with the ability to listen and to be thankful. You have arrived far, soaring beyond incomprehensible limits and insurmountable difficulties, walking with constant steps, sometimes firmly and others flimsily. In your world of a hermit, you created silences full of music and powerful images overflowing with richness, contrasts and subtlety. Now you continue to travel, always present, toward your essence.

Dear Gloria, thank you for sharing with us your Life and all your Treasures; thank you for your courage and the risks you assumed, the trials and questions; thank you for your motherhood, for your lightness and comprehension, for your listening and your music.

Thank you for allowing us to caress and admire you, for your hugs, laughter, and kisses. We will continue to walk together in this adventure, discovering mysteries and navigating towards our Essence.

See you soon, sister!

Gloria, the Name Says It All

Marc Beneria Surkin

Gloria, the name says it all
Celestial body
Navigating through space like
A luminous chimera
Full of magic and intensity
You didn’t leave anyone indifferent
With your beauty
penetrating, bewitching
blinding

Gloria, the name says it all
Always wanting to go higher
Higher, more perfect, more
profound
More, more...
Your perfectionism
Made you climb great heights
It made you fly
But perhaps it didn’t let you to be
Simply you

Gloria, the name says it all
Daughter of light
Celestial chimera
Primordial nature
Gloria

Healers in the Dzogchen Community

Connecting With Sound

An interview with Italian drummer Nico Lippolis about sound therapy in the classroom

Mirror: Nico, you have been working with sound healing for some time now but you are also a professional drummer. Can you tell us a bit about your background as a musician?

Nico Lippolis: First of all I started teaching myself just by instinct. But then I realized that I wanted to deepen my knowledge and I started working with different teachers in Italy. One of them was a drummer from the Rai orchestra, who was into all this swing stuff because he was fairly old and had gone through the beginning of jazz in the 50s and 60s. He taught me this old school way of playing drums, which is the fundamental way that still, today, inspires a lot of drummers. Then I started to study more experimental music with another younger teacher called Marcello Magliocchi who is still very active in the improvised experimental music scene in Europe.

The musical education that I received from these teachers really opened up my mind and I didn't focus on one genre in particular, but started to really experiment a lot in different fields. When I moved to Berlin in 1994 I discovered a huge scene of multimedia artists and started to work with video makers, with dancers, with theater people, with all kinds of productions that needed music. But of course I was also playing with jazz musicians, rock and roll musicians, punk rock bands, and so on, so I had a very wide sphere of musical experience. My newest project is called Ur, a progressive experimental duo with me on drums and my partner Jacopo Bertacco on baritone guitar and vocals (<https://nft.urband.net>).

Mirror: While you were living in Berlin you also connected with Chögyal Namkhai Norbu and Dzogchen teaching?

Nico: Yes, this came years later, in 2005. I discovered his name for the first time and



was really curious and inspired by his forward to the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Then I discovered other books by Rinpoche published in Italian and every time I went to bookstores in Italy, I looked for his books on the shelves. I found some that had been written together with Adriano Clemente such as *The Supreme Source* and other texts related to the teachings and Tibetan culture in general and this really opened a world for me.

But then of course, theory is not enough so when I saw that Rinpoche was coming to Berlin in 2013 – there were big, big posters all over the place in Berlin – I thought I have to go, I have no doubt that I want to meet this person and really understand what the practice is.

The Mirror: You mentioned the connection between Rinpoche's teaching and the experience of sound and vibration that you're working with through music.

Nico: Yes, exactly. The first bell that rang in my mind was the translation of the *Bardo Tödrol* or liberation through hearing and I felt that this was related to what I was looking for in the essence of music while I was playing. I felt the connection with Rinpoche's teaching through the experience of sound and vibration which are the principles that brought me to start working with sound healing and deepen the work on the essence of sound.

When I came to the practice the first time, sounding the seed syllables, feeling this resonance – the empirical practice of feeling the vibration inside your body and then observing what this vibration

produces as a movement in your system, your body and the connection between the mind, the energy aspect and the body aspect – it was the experience of guruyoga that opened the door and the connection to deepening the sound aspect. And this also somehow changed my way of interpreting music and composing.

Mirror: How did you get involved in sound healing?

Nico: For me it was a natural evolution to go from the conventional way of playing music (it was never conventional actually...), to the discovering of ancestral instruments and traditions that used sound as a healing method, so I studied this topic and started working with Tibetan singing bowls, gongs and frame drums. As a percussionist it was known territory for me and it felt very natural to follow this path. Once I had tried the effect of these instruments on the body, I had no doubts about how effective sound can be for relaxation, meditation and balance.

Mirror: And how did you connect this to working with young people?

Nico: The Dzogchen tradition gives this very precise advice on what to do in order to feel this connection with sound, with light, and this is really an incredible treasure in the period right now in which there is a lot of confusion and destruction especially for the younger generation.

I have some experience of that because I've been working in schools teaching music through different projects such as drum circles, percussion, and so on so I knew a little bit what the teachers, the directors of the school, and the students themselves have been going through in this difficult time, especially teenagers.

In general, teenagers have a difficult time with problems of identity, hormones and many other factors. I wanted to find a method using music that would give some tools to young people to become less conflictual, less problematic, or at least recognize that, and then work with it in a creative way instead of being destructive or moving into depression or anxiety. I had already been doing some research in this field. Then the pandemic started and the schools everywhere were overwhelmed

with rules and regulations that affected the scholastic programs and the whole school education system.

In the last two or three years especially, young people have suffered a lot from social distancing and all the rules related to it. It has also become increasingly difficult for teenagers to relate to this chaos of daily life which makes them feel disoriented and in the worst cases pushes them into depression or addictions. So, I decided to use the sound meditation in schools to give the students some tools to start looking inside themselves, to become more confident in recognizing the nature of mind.

Mirror: When you conduct a class with young people how do you organize it?

Nico: At the moment I'm working with this school in Berlin. Each class has a session of 90 minutes. I bring the instruments with me, Tibetan singing bowls, gongs, also frame drums, depending on the situation. At the school, I also have African percussion instruments. So the range goes from the meditative sound of the singing bowls but can also develop and become movement or dance. When I notice that the situation is a bit tense, I always use a short meditation before we start. It will often be the first time that these young people have started to experience an inner view of themselves.

We have yoga mats so they take their shoes off and sit down and I show them a meditation posture with crossed legs for those who are able and I also show them alternatives. That way they can start to observe the body and its limits. I explain that by working on their posture this can help the energy flow within the body. After that we start focusing on breathing and sometimes do some simple pranayama exercises.

Then I start playing the singing bowls and they focus on the sound. When the vibration comes in the room is filled with harmonic sounds because these instruments are made perfectly for these kinds of frequencies. When their focus gets deeper, I sometimes guide the students with visualization on inner points in the body, going slowly without getting into complicated meditation, but just trying to give a glimpse of what it is, and focusing the attention on the body. The sound always leads this meditation. After that, they lie down and relax and the sounds go everywhere creating a sound bath. When we finish they slowly come back and we talk a little about how the experience was and get some feedback.

In Berlin, I have to deal with students who can be quite tough at times because in the last five or six years a lot of people have been coming here from all over the world, especially from war torn countries, such as Syria, Yemen, and now Ukraine and we have a lot of new teenagers coming from different and difficult backgrounds at school. Music and sound are a really great method to start this non-verbal communication where you don't need concepts, you don't need words, you don't need rules, just the sound and the music that goes everywhere so that the group really becomes one and there is this feeling of oneness.

The teachers are also present during the class, they can see this work and also

inspired by this work and said he would like to introduce it on a regular basis into the school programs, starting from next year.

The same teacher told me something that I also knew, that many students at the school were depressed and have been facing some very difficult situations in the last couple of years and could really benefit from this kind of work.

Mirror: Do you have any suggestions for teachers and professionals working with young people today?

Nico: I really think that these kinds of methods could be used by schools at every level, starting from primary school up to university and possibly even in the work-



experience it and it also gives them an opportunity to relax, too. In fact, last August the school director asked me to start the school year with two days of sound meditation for all the teachers. It went very well and the feedback was really nice although I was surprised because there were some very skeptical teachers participating.

Mirror: I understand that you are also starting to work with one of the high schools in your area.

Nico: Last September I moved from Berlin to Puglia in Italy and I was invited by a teacher who works with a local center that offers courses for creative development to give a course at a high school here in Cisternino. She organized a class and we did it in the main hall of the school with the first class of 25 students and then a month later we did another class. The school director was very

place because this type of work really has the potential to change society in a positive way. This way of working with the awareness of body, sound, and breath, through an energetic inner view, is really very helpful and could be the source, the core of teaching in schools.

And so I think that schools should start to bring in this type of real change instead of only working with an overload of information. Schools should be developing more human beings, who are really able to have the tools to be more effective, to change the problems that we have to face now and in the near future.

Mirror: Thank you, Nico. ©

Nico Lippolis in performance with UR
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHObfioYjB>

A Conversation With Nina Robinson

At Dzamling Gar, Tenerife, after
the Mandarava Retreat, March
2023

Nina has been a student of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu since 1980 and in 2002 was authorized by him to teach the Mandarava longlife practice. Since then she has led many retreats in various parts of the world.

Mirror: Nina, could you tell us how and when you first connected with Buddhist teaching?

Nina: I met the Buddhist teaching before I met Rinpoche. Because I was suffering from migraines a lot I was going to an acupuncturist. When he went on holiday he recommended a woman friend, an acupuncturist, who was from the East. And I asked her, "How is it you're so calm and collected at nine o'clock at night when I've arrived late and you've been working all day?" She said, "Oh, maybe because lately I've been going to this Zen meditation, just round the corner from you". So the next morning, I was there.

When I first went there, it was February, and it had snowed in London so it was all silent and beautiful and a five minute walk from my house. When I knocked on the door they answered and said, "Oh, you want the orange people down the road" because I looked a bit of a hippie. I said, "No, I don't. I want the Zen center". The Zen meditation was mostly sitting for two hours from 6 till 8 every morning and 6 till 8 every evening.

After four days of that I was just a flood of tears – I couldn't stop crying – so the friends whose house I was living in with my kids said, "Oh, we're attending the Buddhist Center. You should come there". So I went to the Buddhist Center to study *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation* by Gampopa, who was a close disciple of Milarepa, and I started reading the songs of Milarepa.

The Jewel Ornament of Liberation was first translated by Guenther, who was a very clever translator, but he had to use a whole long phrase of complicated words to explain *rigpa* because there's no equivalent in our Western languages. So I thought I have to learn this language because it uses words for states of mind that we know nothing about, and I began to learn a bit of



Nina at Dzamling Gar, February 2023.

Tibetan. I've made an aspiration in my next life to learn Tibetan.

Alf Vial, the person who was leading the group at the Buddhist Center, recommended that we take Refuge from Ato Rinpoche, who was living in Cambridge. Apparently the Dalai Lama had asked Ato Rinpoche to make a Buddhist center in England but he preferred to keep his days free for any students who wanted to learn about Buddhism and he spent his nights working in a mental hospital for old people.

He used to lead discussion groups in various places and somebody invited him to Canterbury University to answer questions from the students. Somebody asked him, "What do you think of these Buddhists in Vietnam who are setting themselves on fire." He said he had no opinion. That he didn't know the people, and he didn't know what their motives were and so he didn't have any opinion. That was a real first lesson for me. That was really a teaching, in just a few words. So Ato Rinpoche was my first real Tibetan Buddhist teacher.

Alf Vial was my Cockney Buddhist teacher. Somebody once asked him how he could call himself a Buddhist teacher since he drinks beer and smokes cigarettes. He replied, "Yes, but I don't malign anybody's character". That was another lesson because we always used to go to the pub after our meetings and have a half pint of lager and a cigarette.

Through knowing Ato Rinpoche, I met Colin Ellar and John Renshaw who told me on Monday that they were going to Italy on Saturday and invited me to come with them. I said, "I can't, I'm a school teacher



Nina in Devon in 1983 or 84.

and I've got three more weeks at school before the end of the term". But I went to school the next day thinking what am I going to tell them? In the staff room I told them that I was going to Italy Saturday and I wrote a letter to the headmistress saying, "I hereby give my notice." That was Monday, by Saturday I had passports, airplane tickets, everything – because I had to take my daughter as well because she was only 16 – and we were off.

John Renshaw, Colin Ellar, Guido Innocenti and his family were on the plane. We all went to a retreat before Merigar was even found. Rinpoche was collecting money to buy a permanent place for the teachings at that retreat. He had a book and his damaraja stamp and every time somebody gave a substantial amount of lire, he put the photo of the person in this book and the stamp next to their photo. One day, a few years ago, we found that book at Merigar and guess who was the person with the most stamps next to their photo? Fabio Andrico.

The retreat was near a village called Volpago, near Monte Belluna, about 60km north of Venice, and there were about 200 people there. It was in June 1980. It was a very hot summer and I got a bubbly heat rash because I wasn't used to being out in the sun.

Mirror: Was this retreat the first time that you met Rinpoche?

Nina: Yes, it was the first time I saw him or heard him speak, and there was just no going back. I went to every retreat I could after that. That first retreat was in June

and in August I was already in Norway for another retreat. And at Christmas in 1980 I was at a retreat in Sardinia.

Mirror: And what were the circumstances that brought you to move to Italy; to be near the Merigar Dzogchen Community?

Nina: Well, I had always wanted to live in Italy right from when I was much younger because my husband at the time had won a Rome scholarship from the Slade School

Mirror: So you finally moved to Merigar in 1986?

Nina: I was living in an uncomfortable situation in the UK and when somebody told Rinpoche, he suggested that I come to Merigar. All I needed was that suggestion. I put all my belongings in the car and drove off. I didn't know where I would stay or how I would live, but Rinpoche had said I should go to Merigar, so I went.

Mirror: How did the Mandarava practice become your main practice?

Nina: After Rinpoche received it in 1984, he came to Merigar and told the story of how he had received it. It seemed to me so important that I have practiced it a lot from then on. I think it was the only *terma* that he taught immediately after he received it, because Ekajati, the main guardian of the Rinpoche's *terma* teachings, gave him permission to do so. Most of the other teachings that he received as *termas* he taught years and years later, after he'd been given permission. Ekajati said, "Now is the time for you to open your mind treasure, and it will be of benefit to as many beings as there are grains of sand in the Ganges". So that's everybody, isn't it? Grains of sand in the Ganges are innumerable so it's not just a benefit for the Community, but for everybody. I thought, this is very beneficial.

I was very much suffering from migraines and I thought the practice might help to overcome them. In the end it did, but it took a long time. When we were in Volpago in 1980, I asked Rinpoche for a mantra for my migraines. He gave me one and I practiced it for many years until it was there in my mind automatically.

Then in 1997, when we were in Tso Pema, a village in Himachal Pradesh in India, Rinpoche showed us the places where Mandarava and Guru Padmasambhava had practiced. He showed us all the places where Guru Padmasambhava had left handprints

» continued on the following page



Nina with Rinpoche in Rajgir during a pilgrimage in 1997.

of Fine Art to study art in Italy and while we were there I thought how can anybody leave this beautiful country?

When I came to the first retreat in Merigar, I was there for a month. There were no buildings there yet except the yellow house; the floor of the basement was deep in manure because it had been used as a stable for race horses. The grass was left to grow high and it was full of flowers that were swarming with butterflies. It was beautiful and it was wild.

Rinpoche fixed up the first 'gönpa', which was just a length of canvas cloth, with a frame of blue cloth around the edges. He took a mallet and two stakes from the car and hammered them into the ground at the top of the hill above the woods. He tied two ends of the canvas to the trees of the woods and the other two ends to the stakes to provide shade for the people listening to the teachings.



During a retreat at Strode House in Remington, Devon taking notes about and making namkhas with Rinpoche. At that time Rinpoche also received some more dreams of the Longsal symbol because the symbol had not yet been completed in his dreams.



Nina working as the secretary at Merigar.

>> *continued from previous page*

and footprints in the rock, which showed that he had mastery over the elements.

One day I saw that everybody was touching their heads to a place at the bottom of a cliff. I thought, "Oh, I might as well try" and didn't think anything about it. I put my head into this place at the bottom of the cliff. Afterwards they told me that it was a head print of Guru Padmasambhava. The next morning when I woke up there was a kind of voice. It wasn't really a voice, but it was a kind of voice that said, "You will never have a migraine again." And I have never had one since. I think this was the result of a long series of practices, not just one event.

I consider it a miracle of Guru Padmasambhava, who, I believe, is our maestro. I feel sure our maestro is Buddha Shakyamuni, Guru Padmasambhava and Garab Dorje. Once I heard Rinpoche giving a public talk and he said, "More than two thousand years ago Shakyamuni Buddha explained that everything is empty, everything is an illusion, but you still don't understand". Which we don't, because we have all these habits of thought and so many prejudices. We believe that this table is solid, for instance. We can't just put our hand through it. Milarepa could sit on the air but we haven't got that capacity. None of us have that mastery of the elements.

I remember some people describing to Rinpoche how they'd been to see Sai Baba and that he could materialize things out of the air, but Rinpoche took no notice of that. Later, during a teaching, Rinpoche said, "People tell me they've been to a guru in India who materializes things. I'm not so interested in that. I'm more interested in de-materializing". This is his teaching about rainbow body. He's not materializing things, not visibly, not in front of people.

Some time ago in Isla Margarita in Venezuela, he said, "Sometimes we can control the weather. I do it sometimes if it's necessary." I'd never heard him say anything like that, but one year we had a two-week retreat at Merigar at Easter time when it usually snows on the cherry blossoms. It was beautiful weather with blue skies all the way through the retreat, except at the end. And Rinpoche said that there would be four drops of rain and not to worry, it wouldn't be more than that. There were clouds and thunder and lightning all around, but blue sky above. And there were four drops of rain. Some people ran away, but the people who believed in him stayed because when he says, "They'll only be four drops," you can believe it. And there were only four drops of rain. So somebody had done some weather control, I think, because it's usually raining or snowing or some terrible weather at Merigar at Easter.

The beings that could see us going towards enlightenment, being taught how to get free from them, were obviously very angry. They were furious. They were determined to rain on us, but they didn't rain until we'd all gone from the woods and got into our cars and gone home. Then it rained. That's what happened.

I had really deep faith in Rinpoche from the beginning, complete faith that he was a totally enlightened master. People had tried to get me interested in transcendental meditation but I thought it was all rubbish, it's not for me. But then I found out that it's not all rubbish and that there are different ways of teaching and getting enlightenment. Buddha Shakyamuni tried all the teachers and found they were not useful, but after he'd sat for six years under the bodhi tree, he got enlightened all by himself. So when the group of us who were in India with Rinpoche went and sat under the bodhi tree at the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodhgaya, he said, "Buddha Shakyamuni sat here for six years, we can manage five minutes".

Rinpoche was sitting next to somebody whose eyes were moving strangely and Rinpoche asked him, "Do you see differently when you do that with your eyes?" And that person said, "No, I just see ordinarily." Rinpoche said, "That's strange because when I look in an ordinary way I see all six dimensions". (All six dimensions: the gods, semi-gods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts and hell beings.) He could see all of them. So, we're very, very fortunate to have such a teacher. To have even been in the same dimension for a little while. It's an incredible fortune. ©

Open Letter – Lettera Aperta

The first ever International newsletter of The Dzogchen Community, sent out from the Namkhai family apartment by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu and John Shane in July 1980 with artwork created by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu using his ten year old son Yeshe's linocut printing set.

John Shane

Text and images © John Shane

In the early years of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's teaching, he didn't like to go to any kind of Dharma center, so when the Community wanted to hold a retreat a suitable place would need to be chosen to hold it. Sometimes retreats were held in tents, but sometimes a hotel or even a whole resort complex was rented for the duration of the retreat.

In 1980 a retreat was held in the elegant Grand Hotel Monte Faito, located on a mountainside overlooking the Bay of Naples, Italy, with Vesuvius visible in the distance the other side of the bay.

Those attending the retreat booked their own rooms, meals were taken in the dining room with waiters in crisp white linen jackets serving us, and the teachings were given in the ballroom. There was even a disco in the basement. This was certainly a different kind of location to any other retreat I had ever attended with my other Buddhist teachers, where everything had been more austere.

During the retreat, as I stood one afternoon with Norbu Rinpoche looking out over the sunny garden, he turned to me and said, 'John, John...!! Do you see the Dakinis dancing...!!'

When I asked where they were, he laughed and pointed in the direction of the tall pine trees waving in the wind the other side of the manicured lawns, and said, 'There...!! There...!! Don't you see them...!!'

He continued laughing, making a big display of being surprised when I told him that all I could see was the trees.

He was always full of fun and liked to joke with me and his other students, so I couldn't tell if he was simply comparing the



movement of the trees to dancing Dakinis or if he was telling me that there were actually Dakinis there that I should be able to see if I had the clarity to see them, but the whole conversation was very light-hearted, so I didn't feel too much of an idiot about not being able to tell what he meant.

But then he suddenly became serious, and looking me squarely in the eyes, he said, 'At the end of the retreat, why don't you come and visit me for a few days at my apartment in Formia?'

This was the last thing I was expecting, and I thanked him profusely, accepting his invitation, after which he said he would tell me after the retreat finished how to get to his home.

When some days later I arrived by train at the railway station in Formia, I was even more surprised to find Rinpoche himself waiting for me with his car, an old Citroen DS.

As he drove me across the town, Rinpoche told me that I would be sleeping on the couch in the living room of the family apartment and that he would himself cooking a Tibetan speciality for dinner that evening.

I had no idea why he had invited me to stay, but I felt really honored that he had, and the whole Namkhai family made me feel really welcome.

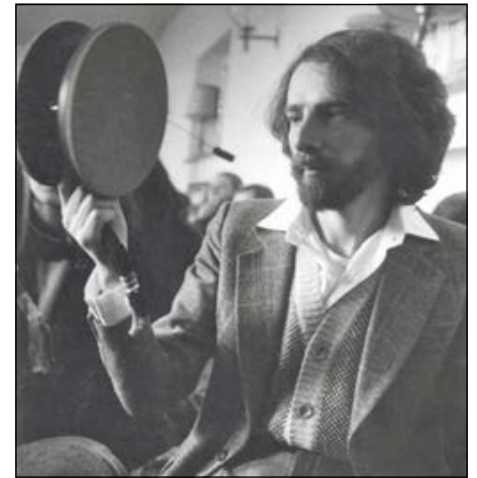
Invited for a weekend, I ended up staying there for six months sleeping on that sofa in the living room, and it was during that time that I began to work on creating with Rinpoche the book that became 'The Crystal And The Way Of Light: Sutra,

Tantra, And Dzogchen', which many people consider to have been the first book to introduce the Dzogchen teachings to a wide Western audience and was certainly the first book to introduce to the world the story of Norbu Rinpoche's early life and education in Tibet.

It's important to remember that before Norbu Rinpoche began to teach, Dzogchen was not taught openly, particularly, to Westerners, but was kept as a reserved and secret teaching, and it was Norbu Rinpoche who opened to the door that gave access to authentic Dzogchen teachings to the wider world.

So the first book of his teachings to be published was very important in that regard. It not only brought many students to Norbu Rinpoche. It also provided an example of how authentic Dzogchen teachings could be presented, outside the context of Buddhist monastic institutions, to what we could call 'ordinary people' in the West.

I wondered later, if – since Rinpoche already knew that I could write and taught creative writing – he had invited me to stay for the weekend as a way to open the possibility that I would work on a book with him, but there was never any indication at the



John Shane at the Monte Faito retreat.

time that that was what was in his mind.

Anyway, whatever his intention in inviting me to visit his home, the work on 'The Crystal' began while I was there, but, as it turned out, it was to take four years of listening to dozens of hours of audio tapes of talks and reading every transcript of every teaching he had ever given to that date, and then continually rewriting the manuscript over and over again before I got the book into the form in which it was finally published.

» continued on the following page



Chogyal Namkhai Norbu at the Monte Faito retreat that was held in 1980 in an elegant hotel situated on a mountainside that overlooks the bay of Naples, Italy. Photo by Jill Purce



Formia with Gaeta visible in the distance, across the bay.



Formia, midway between Rome and Naples, where the Namkhai family lived in 1980. Photo showing marina and town, with the mountains behind.

» continued from previous page

The full story of what happened as 'The Crystal' was written will have to wait for another time, but another publication that can be considered a 'first' was launched while I was actually staying with Rinpoche and his family at their apartment in Formia: the first ever international newsletter of the Dzogchen Community, to which we gave the title 'Open Letter', a title accompanied by a Tibetan letter 'Ah', representing the primordial state of Dzogchen, that one could describe as a state of total, complete openness.

Remember that this newsletter was sent out at a time when the internet had not even been thought of and there were no mobile phones or desktop computers in every home.

International communication at that time was only possible by sending letters through the post or by using a landline phone to make an expensive call.

When we decided that it was time to try to put people in the Community that

was beginning to form around the world in touch with each other by mailing out a newsletter, I sat at the Namkhai family dining table with Rinpoche while we worked out what we wanted it to say, and then I wrote out by hand what we had decided on.

After that, Rinpoche went to look for a linocut printing set belonging to his son Yeshi, and, using the cutting tool, he carefully carved the illustrations for the newsletter into several rectangular pieces of brown linoleum, gently blowing away the little curls of lino that the cutting tool dug out.

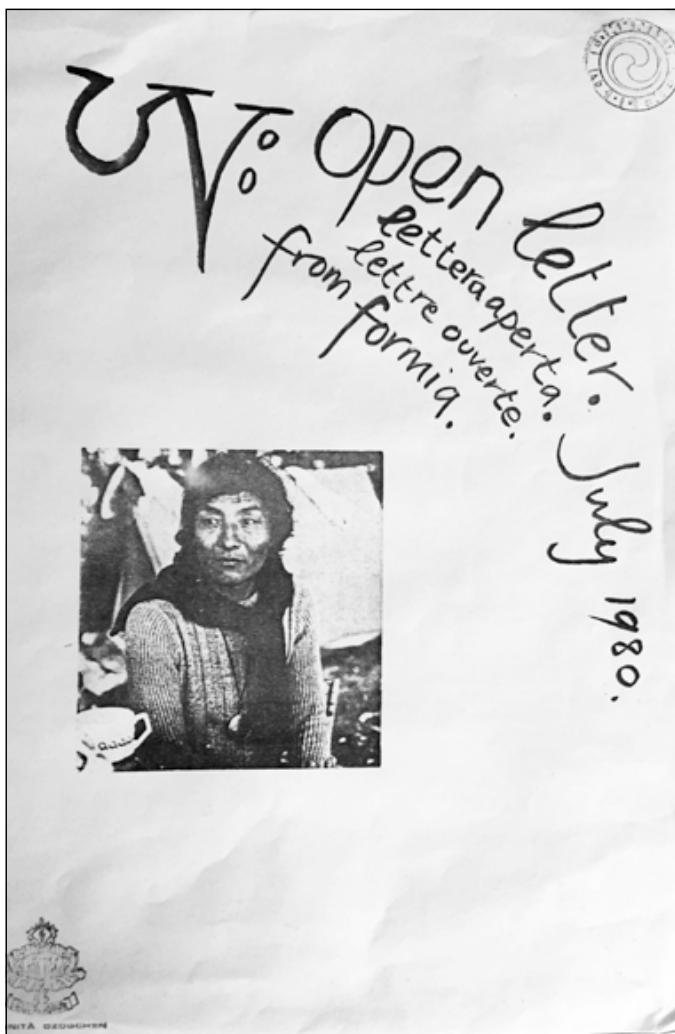
Then, while Rinpoche's wife Rosa, and his son and daughter Yeshi, Yuchen and I watched, Rinpoche squeezed black ink out of its silver metallic tube, spreading it onto a wooden board, after which he ran the roller over the board to pick up the ink and, one by one, coated the ink onto the rectangles of lino into which he had carved the letters and images he had imagined as illustrations for the newsletter.

When the ink was fully spread, he laid out some sheets of white paper and, again – one by one – he slowly pressed each rectangle of lino down onto one of the sheets of paper.

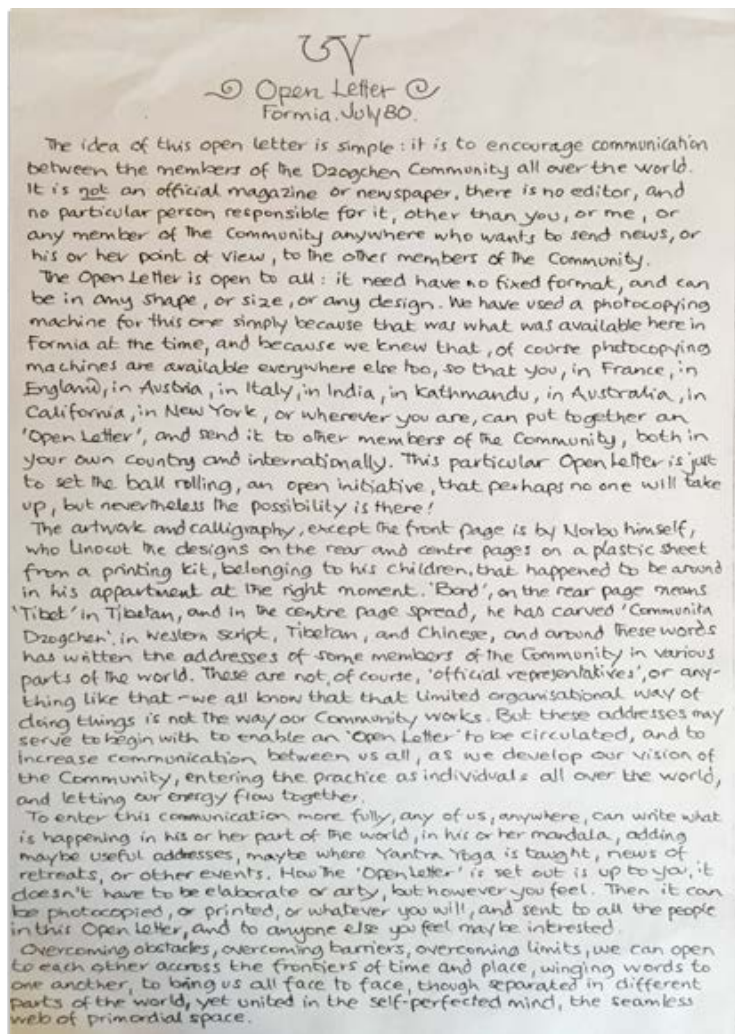
As Rinpoche tentatively lifted each of the rectangles of lino off the paper, the Namkhai family and I all clapped our hands and cheered, laughing with delight as we saw the prints of the images he had created emerge in the black ink he had clearly stamped onto the white paper.

After the ink had fully dried, we put the pages of the newsletter together and the next day, while Yeshi and Yuchen were at school, Rinpoche and I walked across the town to the local photocopy shop where we made several dozen copies of the 'Open Letter' to send out by mail to community members all over the world in envelopes on which we would laboriously write out the names and addresses of the Community members.

As the wording of the content of the 'Open Letter' reflects, at that time, Rin-



Cover Page of the 'Open Letter' with a small photo of Chogyal Namkhai Norbu from the Campomolino retreat and brush stroke calligraphy by John Shane of a Tibetan letter 'A' and the title of the newsletter. The Tibetan letter 'A' is the first letter of the Tibetan alphabet, and the white 'A', in the context of Dzogchen - since it is the first letter that precedes all others in the alphabet - represents the primordial state of the individual, while the letter A's white color represents the self-perfected purity of the primordial state that is beyond all limits of time and place and beyond all dualistic limits of subject and object, good and bad, etc. The cover page is stamped with Norbu Rinpoche's seals of the Dzogchen Community.



Central Page of the Open Letter newsletter handwritten at the Namkhai family dining table by John Shane.

The 'Open Letter' also contained another two pages with the same text as above translated into Italian and handwritten by Giacobella Gaetani, with the title, 'Lettera Aperta'.

poche was not in favor of forming centers or of creating an organization.

In fact, he often used to say that organization was contrary to the teachings, and this view of his is not only reflected in the text of the 'Open Letter', but can also be seen reflected even more clearly in other documents remaining from that time, such as the brochures that were prepared and circulated to announce upcoming retreats, copies of which I still have in my archive.

Other than permitting a small number of those printed brochures, Rinpoche would not in those days allow any advertising of any kind for his teachings or retreats, saying that advertising conditioned people and the Dzogchen teachings exist to free people from all conditioning.

He said that people had to have a deep cause, not a superficial cause created by

publicity, to come into contact with his teachings.

He also used to say that the point of the teachings was to help one go beyond all limits.

'Awareness is the only rule in Dzogchen,' he would say. 'You have to come out of all the cages with which society has imprisoned you and in which you have closed yourself up.'

His aim was to teach the essence of the Dzogchen teachings, the essence of Tibetan Dharma, and the free-form structureless idea of how the Community should be at that time was in harmony with that aim.

Later, of course, as he always said he would do, he worked with circumstances to adapt to the changing conditions that arose as the Community developed and grew in size after his books and his con-

tinual travels around the world to give teachings began to attract more and more students.

But it seems clear to me that he didn't want to permit any structure or any organization to be formed around him or any centers to be formed by his Community until he was confident that he had enough students who had fully understood that all those material aspects that can surround the teachings themselves - the structure, the organization, and the centers - are not the principal things.

It was only some years after the 'Open Letter' had gone out, only after Rinpoche had made it clear to his students that the teachings are essentially not about structure and centers that he began to consider founding a centre.

» continued on the following page



'Dzogchen Community' in four languages: Tibetan, Italian, Chinese, and Burmese. Linocut illustration carved by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. Greeting in Tibetan and names and addresses of community contacts around the world in the handwriting of Norbu Rinpoche. Stamp from the seal of Norbu Rinpoche.



Tibetan scene with a yogi in a cave, a yak, birds flying over a temple, a stupa, with juniper smoke emanating from a ser-kang. Tibetan writing of the name of the country of Tibet, and its equivalent pronunciation indicated in Norbu Rinpoche's Western transcription system as 'Bond'. Lino cut by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. Illustration carved by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu using his ten year old son Yeshi's linocut printing set.

» continued from previous page

And even then, it is significant that he used the name 'Gar' to define his centers, 'Gar' being, of course, the Tibetan term for a temporary encampment of nomads rather than a permanently fixed place.

This choice of a name was intended to remind everyone of what he said so often in the days when he would neither teach in centers of other Dharma groups or allow any centers to be founded in his name.

'The true center is the individual,' he would say, 'but don't interpret those words in an egocentric way. What I mean is that, in Dzogchen, the individual's own primordial state is the true center, the true center of the universe. Everything else arises from that center as the play of the energy of the primordial state.'

I will be writing more stories of my travels and work with Rinpoche, and it's my hope that 'The Mirror' – of which I was a founding editor – will be able to publish some of them.

But I have a lot of stories to tell, and, as I'm getting old, there is less time left for me to tell them than there once was. So I'm planning to revive the 'Open Letter' as a place online for me to publish my stories and to post podcasts of them for those who sign up to read or listen to them. 'Watch this space...!', as the saying goes... ©

John Shane is a poet, author, musician, and teacher of Creative Writing and during the years that Norbu Rinpoche gave teachings speaking in Italian, he often translated Rinpoche's teachings into English at many retreats in Italy and other parts of the world. John also worked closely for four years with Chögyal Namkhai Norbu writing 'The Crystal And The Way Of Light: Sutra, Tantra, and Dzogchen' for him, as well as translating from Italian into English a number of his other books, including 'Dzogchen: The Self-Perfected State'. Later, John was a founding editor of 'The Mirror' newspaper. He currently divides his time between working at his studio in England, where his family resides, and doing personal retreats at his old farmhouse in Tuscany near Merigar.

In those pre-internet, pre-home computer, pre-cellular phone days – long before Merigar was even thought of – when he was at his home, Norbu Rinpoche used to receive phone calls almost every day that came in from all over the world on a beige bakelite Telecom Italia telephone that was plugged into the wall of the Namkhai family living room with a long black curly wire.

When the phone rang and Rinpoche picked up the receiver, he would often find himself speaking to someone who had either themselves just been given a diagnosis of some kind of serious illness or who had had some accident, or who wanted to talk to him about some other person – perhaps a loved one – who was caught up in a drama of physical or mental suffering of one kind or another.

Listening to Rinpoche respond to these frequent calls asking for his help and hearing the advice he gave as he answered the calls, I came to realize for the first time the weight of the responsibility he carried as a result of his having accepted the role of becoming the spiritual teacher of so many people.

I didn't, of course, have the same kind of responsibilities Rinpoche had, but while I was staying with the Namkhai family in Formia I received a letter from a friend who led a Buddhist group back in England who was suffering from a serious illness, and inspired by the example of Rinpoche's compassionate responses to the people who phoned him, in my reply to my friend's letter, I wrote this poem:

For Mala Young A Dharma Sister Dying of Cancer

15th. May, 1980. Formia, Italy.
(Written at the private apartment of the Dzogchen Master Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, whilst staying there as a guest.)

John Shane

Bodies are failing things, Mala,
always overcome by time,
and yet body, form and matter
are but grosser forms of mind.

Freedom is hard fought for
and hard won.
The truth is often bitter,
answers often paradoxes,
questions seldom one.

Surrendering seems easy
as long as we can
hold a little something back;
the body is a vehicle,
yet when it gets weak,
our fear makes our vision black.

Death and darkness
are not easy things to face.
Each stands alone,
in this there's nothing new.
Yet each, alone, is also
fully part of all around;
Mala, none of this
is news to you.

Searching for
an independent self,
none can be found;
all is impermanent,
all interpenetrating;
mind is essentially free
only our conditioning
ties us down,
preventing us from being
all that we could be.

But these are only words,
each one of them a liar,
these are only words
and your pain is like a fire.

Yes, it burns, but its burning
is like a purifying flame.
There is no need for
any sense of guilt,
there is no blame.

Your cancer is not
a cause for shame.

Fire, needing
darkness
to show light,
flows upwards
in the river
of the night.

Brave sister,
proud lioness,
defender of the dharma,
in the dancing dream of life
your song is singing true
even though, at times,
your sickness
may seem to be undoing you.

Unfolding itself and
folding itself
at the same time,
in-breath and out-breath,
weaves the way,
between life and death.

We're always afraid of
the unknown somehow
but there's nowhere to go, Mala,
because it's always
here and now;

and I wanted to send you my love
and sympathy of angels
and, of course, words won't do,
but words are all I have to send,
and so I send them to you.



Every
reads **1** The
Mirror



THE MIRROR

Newspaper of the International Dzogchen Community

News from the International
Dzogchen Community
of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu

Read online at
www.melong.com