



# THE MIRROR

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June 2023

The Preciousness of the Teachings  
Listening, Reflecting and Moving Forward  
The Tibet of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu  
Mudra of Samaya



INTERNATIONAL  
DZOGCHEN  
COMMUNITY

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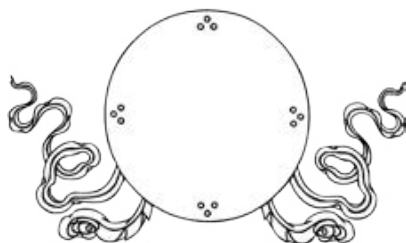
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## Editorial

**W**e'd like to talk to you about The Mirror. Please take a moment to read through our message to the end to understand where we are coming from, the present situation, and where we'd like to arrive.

When The Mirror was founded in the early days of 1990, it was printed in Italy as a newspaper, in black and white, and was mailed out, or handed out, by subscription. The fourth issue of the newspaper in July 1990 celebrated the arrival of HH the Dalai Lama at Merigar West and printed the teaching that he gave in the Merigar Gönpa. From the start, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu was very supportive of the publication and it was, and still is, serving as a means for communication between members of the Dzogchen Community around the world.



We have come some way from those early days of the bulky newspaper format and gradually tried to adapt to a changing world and the evolving needs of our international community and our readership across the globe over the years. In December 2014 the newspaper format was transformed into an A4 full color magazine, available online for downloading and printed for paper lovers. The Mirror website was launched where the same articles were available for reading online. With time, we added an Italian language version of the website, a Russian, Spanish and Chinese version. All this material is also shared online on our Facebook pages and our Telegram channels.

We've done our very best to reach and provide material for language speakers through our international community, but now we really need your help in different ways.

**Translation teams:** can you join our voluntary translation teams to help to translate material into your language from time to time? Our Italian translation team does a wonderful job but we also need Spanish, Russian, and Chinese translators to give a hand and keep our websites up to date.

**The Mirror Archive:** In addition, we have a wealth of articles, teachings, and news items from 1990 onwards about the Master and the entire Dzogchen Community freely available online in our Archive. While we are investigating the creation of a search engine responding to key words, it would also give greater value to this mountain of material if we could find voluntary help to manually list the material available online such as Rinpoche's teachings, the founding and development of Community groups and Gars, personal stories and so on.

**Donations:** Finally, we really depend on your monetary donations to help cover the costs of our editors, websites, layout, and printing to keep The Mirror alive. Up to now we have raised less than half of our yearly expenses. Please donate. Many drops make an ocean! ©

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The Mirror Team

# Help to Support The Mirror

The Mirror is the voice of the International Dzogchen Community. Please help us to continue and improve this invaluable service by supporting it with a donation! Thank you.

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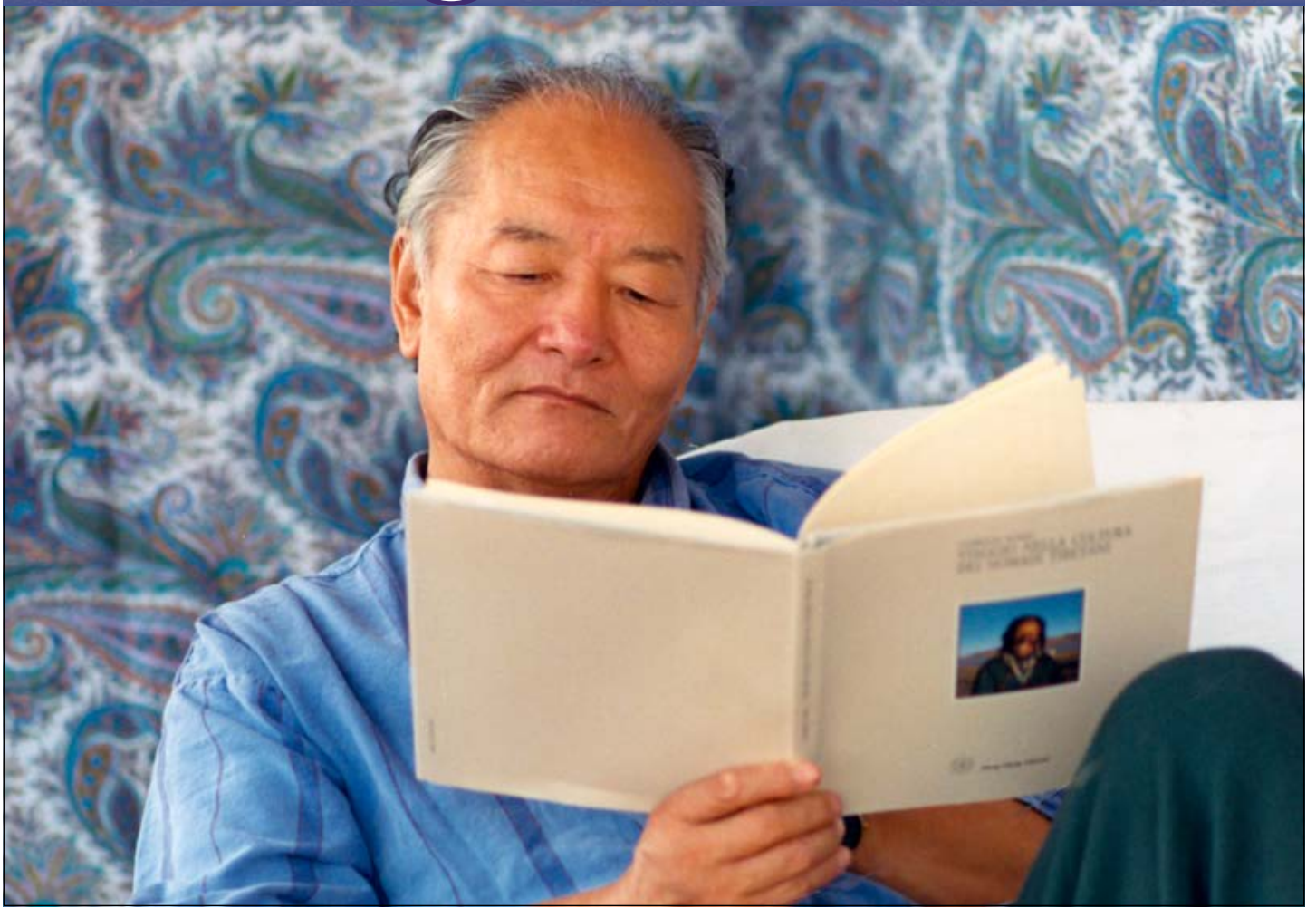


Photo 1992 by Modonesi Namkhai

# The Preciousness of the Teachings

The preservation and the purity of the teachings is the responsibility of all those who are involved with the teachings.

From the teachings of Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche given in California, November 4th, 1979.

Originally published in The Mirror issue 11, September 1991

I want to explain a bit about things in general. We find among us that people have their own practice, their own master, their own lineage. That's not only true of someone who is following Buddhism. But when one follows any teaching, it's always like that. And one has these characteristics even if one is

not following the teaching. That is to say, this is characteristic of the human being.

And in general we all have an enormous amount of confusion about this. When one wants to follow a teaching, one thinks many times about "Whether I should follow or whether I shouldn't follow". Particularly people who follow some particular school get worried. And the truth is that we all have a lot of these conflicts.

But it's very important to try to understand first of all, that through the teachings one must try to open oneself. Because the principle of the teaching has a way of working, has a real function. Man can always make a mistake. But the teaching cannot be mistaken.

The teaching can appear in many different forms, in different schools, but its essence and principle must always be the same. And therefore one must know that.

One must know what is the true principle that one must be following. And one must know where one must arrive. That doesn't depend on a particular person who is teaching or a particular master who is presenting the teachings. What principle you are following, where you are going, depends on the person who follows. If I must realize myself, I have to realize me, myself. It's not my teacher who must realize me, or my school which must realize the teaching.



When one puts this problem before the teaching, it's extremely damaging. Damaging for the person who practices and damaging for the teaching itself and the school to which one belongs, because we're interested in the teaching. Because this means not only a few people or an individual, but each of us has his or her own way of being interested in the teachings and of taking the interest of the teachings into consideration. And this interest must proceed. And this must above all proceed for others.

### Benefit for others

In the Buddhist teaching, one of the first things one considers is the benefit for others, and what gives benefit to others is above all the teachings. So you have to have a teaching that works, a teaching that is pure and authentic. And this guarantee of the teachings depends on the people who are interested in and participating in the teaching.

You must never think that the teaching is somehow the property of some chosen few. Normally this is how people see the matter. For example, people speak of His Holiness, that His Holiness is the owner of the teachings, like somebody is the owner of a precious jewel. But that is not true because nobody has given him the job. Nobody has given that authority to any such person. The teaching is in the common interest of all beings and therefore the preservation and the purity of the teachings is the responsibility of all those who are involved with the teachings. Therefore it's extremely important that all the people and practitioners who are involved in the teaching should be active. And thus they must, above all, be responsible and aware of their responsibility, otherwise one's Bodhicitta is really just a matter of words.

### Responsibility

For me, for example, what is most valuable, most precious, is the teaching because the only thing that can resolve the problems of a human being definitively is realization. If a person doesn't become realized, he will always find himself at the level of dualism. Where can one find one's reawakening? Only from the teachings. And for this reason the teachings are very important.

I know what the value of the teachings is. Therefore I assume my responsibility before the teachings because I know how precious the teachings are. If, for me, the only thing which is truly precious is the teachings, then I know that's true also for others. If I seriously feel compassion for others, then I must use all my strength to keep this precious teaching as it should be. And I must use all my strength to carry the teaching forward, and what I know, I must communicate to others. And this which I do is what I consider true compassion. And if this is true for me, it's true for others. The teaching is something to which all those interested in must commit themselves to.

When we think of Tibetan Buddhism, many people think to do something for Tibetan Buddhism out of sympathy or affection for the Tibetans or for the Tibetan tradition. But sympathy for the Tibetans and doing something for them is another matter.

But someone who understands the value and preciousness of the teachings, particularly of the Dzogchen teachings, is not just motivated by sympathy for the Tibetans or interest in oriental

things. He knows that this is something precious to be saved, not to be lost. Therefore I habitually ask those who are interested to assume their responsibility.

One's first responsibility is to practice. If you want to take your responsibilities towards the teachings, that is to say, do something for the benefit of others, first of all, you must better yourself. To do that you must practice. It may be that one does not know how to practice, then the first step of course is to learn, to try to understand.

In order to understand you must not shut yourself in. I'm not saying that all schools, all masters, are the same. You have to treat everything the same way. You have to be open at both ends. Some people might say you have to give importance to every school, every tradition, every path. I can understand that, but it's not the case that someone who is interested in becoming realized should make him or herself a slave to that outlook.

### Understanding

From our point of view, to follow a teaching means that that teaching gives a means or instrument for liberating the person. And you must find this in whatever teaching it may be. If someone has communicated this to you, then that corresponds to the teachings. If this isn't so, it means that in this case teaching has been conditioned by the people involved. Then it's up to you, the person interested, to have enough awareness to work with that.

Many people, when they follow a teaching, say, "Now I've understood. What I was involved with before isn't so very right." And there is a kind of conversion, or change, like somebody changing his clothes. But that is not a correct procedure either, because if you have truly understood, there is nothing to change.

The Dzogchen teaching doesn't give a garment or suit of clothes or a new way of presenting yourself. You can be as you are. But what the teaching gives is an awakening. If I hadn't understood before, now I've understood. Now if I've understood, whether what I've understood is the Dzogchen teaching or another teaching, I have really understood. So we don't have to create problems.

### Problems

When a human being has decided to have a problem, the problem always grows, conflicts make progress. But if you know from the beginning there is no conflict, then if somebody is creating conflicts with me or in front of me, I find it unimportant.

In the same way, it's very important that if a practitioner feels him or herself to be a true practitioner of Dzogchen, he must find himself like a person sitting on a mountain peak, with the whole panorama open to him. He has no conflict. If I don't create a conflict, somebody else who comes along and creates a conflict doesn't have the power to condition me. There is no reason to go judging people. What is important is to observe oneself.

As Shantideva said, "If a certain area is full of thorns, and it is very difficult to walk through these thorny bushes, do you have to cover the whole mountainside in order to walk there? You can't do that. How do you walk there then? You have to have very thick soles on your shoes." It depends, therefore, on the person him or

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herself to deal with the situation. You can never succeed in destroying all the elements that might disturb you. It is more important to deal with yourself and not be disturbed. So what's most important is the awareness of the practitioner himself.

We always go around criticizing other people. In every situation we can find grounds for conflict. In this case it is very important to liberate oneself, so that you don't find conflict outside. And what I'm describing is above all a way of being a practitioner of Dzogchen. It's not important to demonstrate to the world that I'm a practitioner of Dzogchen. What we're interested in obtaining is realization and realization doesn't come by my exhibiting something. Realization is not dependent on other people.

### Being active

As regards the teachings, one must be extremely active. Active means that I myself, the person, participates. I do something to realize myself. You have to understand that teachers and masters have their power and their capacities. But you must understand that the fundamental capacity of teachers and masters is transmission. A power greater than that of transmission does not exist. Transmission is a way of developing your progress in that practice. But before developing that, you have to have a principle.

If we speak, for example, of making a flower grow and develop, this means we have to use fertilizer and plant food and water and so forth. It means there is already a flower. If there is no flower, there is nothing to help grow, to cultivate. Likewise, at the beginning there is a teacher who has explained and transmitted orally, and this is indispensable.

Then when the person has found the teaching, it is up to the person himself. It's no longer the master's job. The master's job is to transmit, to make you understand, to give you the methods which you will cultivate and develop. But the rest of it, doing the rest of the job, is the disciple's work.

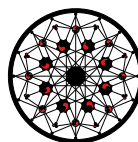
### The path of wisdom

The path towards realization is called the path of wisdom. The path of wisdom has nothing to do with somebody passively going to receive a blessing. It has to do with one participating directly on one's own. In a Sutra, Buddha said, "A person who has sacrificed and renounced for all his life as a monk, who has paid honor and respect to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, who has continuously made offerings, who has continuously done purifications, prostrations and the like, has accumulated a great deal of merit. But compared to a person who is in the state of *shiné* for the amount of time that it takes an ant to walk from the tip of the nose to the bridge of the nose," – that is to say, for a few seconds – "that is hundreds of times more important than that entire lifetime of sacrifice."

Once one has entered onto the path of wisdom, then one has finally begun the way to realization. The path of wisdom does not mean a mental concept that depends on having good intentions, or performing some benefit with body, voice and mind. It means going into the state of the individual as one is. It's not only the Dzogchen teaching which says this, but all of the teachings of Buddhism in general. Their ultimate stage is always pointing, for example, to-

wards *shiné*. This means that one must participate oneself. If you don't participate, nobody can accomplish anything.

Thus what is it that the Dzogchen teaching really communicates? It communicates that one must open one's eyes, and must not be a passive receiver, but an active participant in the teaching. As I am active, then I also help other people who are interested to understand what's involved. According to me, these are very important things to understand. ❁



## Join the Team!

### Give a Hand to the International Gakyil

Dear IDC members,

The International Gakyil is looking for a team of Assistants in the Yellow, Red, and Blue areas.

The International Dzogchen Community (IDC) is based on the principles of awareness, respect, and collaboration. To ensure that the Community remains vibrant and dynamic, members need to collaborate and take responsibility for the overall health and direction of the IDC.

The International Gakyil asks interested and dedicated community members to step forward and apply to become Assistants to the International Gakyil. This role requires the ability and desire to start collaborating by taking responsibility for IDC projects and activities, and the opportunity to understand the international processes and relationships of the IDC. The Assistants to the International Gakyil are the future candidates to become full International Gakyil Members, and they ensure the continuity of the International Gakyil and the stability of the IDC through their direct experience, involvement in and understanding of their role, and the commitment it requires.

Please see below the CALL FOR INTERNATIONAL GAKYIL and submit your application by June 12, 2023.

We need your support to go forward with many interesting projects and activities!

Thank you for your attention.

Warm regards,  
International Gakyil  
Miranda, Barbara Gabriella, Vince

The International Gakyil (IG) is a volunteer group of International Dzogchen Community (IDC) members whose mission is to facilitate and promote collaboration between all IDC Gars and Lings, support their local activities, and provide oversight and global services to all IDC members. They are also responsible for the administrative and information functions of the IDC association. The global services and the administrative and information functions include:

- \* Membership policy & Dzogchen.net (Membership Management System)
- \* Webcast platform
- \* The Mirror
- \* International Teachers (payroll & administration)
- \* Copyright and Trademark
- \* Collaborate with the Gars/Lings on different matters
- \* Manage legal and financial issues for the IDC
- \* Lead the IDC/ASIA house project in Dzamling Gar
- \* Collaborate with the International Atiyoga Foundation, ASIA, Shang Shung Publications Impresa Sociale S.r.l.

The Board of Directors of the IDC, the IG in office, is composed of four people:

- \* Miranda Shannon, President;
- \* Barbara Giurlanda, Vice President and Yellow;
- \* Vince Li Wen Tai, Red;
- \* Gabriella Schneider, Blue

All current IG members will end their term by the Spring/Early Summer of 2024. In order to organize a smooth handover, the IG is looking for interested and dedicated IDC members to join its team as assistants for a trial period of six to nine months, with the serious intention of becoming IG members for the next three year term (approx. 2023–2025). The exact start and end dates will also depend on the scheduling of the Annual General Assembly which occurs yearly in the spring or summer.

To apply, please send a letter of interest and a curriculum vitae to [blue@dzogchen.net](mailto:blue@dzogchen.net), [yellow@dzogchen.net](mailto:yellow@dzogchen.net) and [red@dzogchen.net](mailto:red@dzogchen.net)

### General requirements

1. IDC membership for the last three consecutive years plus the current year. Members of longer standing are a plus
2. Previous experience working on a Gar or Ling Gakyil, or another IDC management position is a plus
3. Knowledge about IDC community processes
4. Availability to attend weekly Sunday meetings, and other occasional meetings during the year
5. Ability to work in a team and online

### Yellow Gakyil Main requirements

1. Experience in finance, administration, and law (having all three is a plus)
2. Proficiency in spoken and written English, proficiency in Italian would be advantageous
3. Basic computer skills

Main responsibilities:

- a. Management of membership and collaborating on the maintenance of Membership Management System
- b. Management of Dzamling Gar IDC House
- c. Work with lawyers to solve legal issues
- d. Communication with accountants and auditor
- e. Budgeting and cost management
- f. Supervision of secretary
- g. Other

### Red Gakyil Main requirements

1. Strong computer and IT skills
2. Proficiency in spoken and written English

Main responsibilities:

- a. Facilitating International Gakyil meetings
- b. Managing communication through various IDC channels (Mass Mail, Mailchimp, Norbunet etc)
- c. Technical and content support of IDC web resources (Webcast, dzogchen.net, dzogchencommunity.org, etc)
- d. Budgeting for IT-related projects
- e. Support International Gakyil's interaction with the Membership Management System

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# Notice of Convocation

## Ordinary International Dzogchen Community (IDC) Members' General Assembly

Notice posted at the headquarter of the IDC in Località Merigar 1, 58031 Arcidosso (Grosseto), Italy  
Arcidosso, 2023 May 31

- \* To the IDC Members
- \* To the Board of Directors (International Gakyil, IG)
- \* To the Auditor
- \* To the College of Gekös (College of Guarantors)

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### Blue Gakyil Main requirements

1. Understanding the essence of Dzogchen and the ability to use this knowledge to communicate with IDC Instructors, Gakyils, Lings, and Members
2. Having passed the Santi Maha Sangha Base Level exam is a plus.
3. Proficient in spoken and written English
4. Strong communication skills
5. Basic computer skills

### Main responsibilities:

- a. Liaison to facilitate and promote collaboration among all IDC Gars and Lings, and support their local activities
- b. Communicate with IDC members and Gakyils regarding their questions and concerns h. Collaborate with Santi Maha Sangha, Vajra Dance, Yantra Yoga and Khaita instructors on matters related to the Teachings
- c. Communicate and collaborate with entities founded by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, and other organizations who share similar interests and activities
- d. Create and update the content of IDC web resources (Webcast, dzogchen.net, dzogchencommunity.org, etc)

Thank you for your interest and for taking into consideration the idea to give us a hand!

The International Gakyil

### Objective

- \* convocation of the Ordinary IDC Members' General Assembly, according to articles 8 and 44 of the IDC Statute.

We wish to inform all IDC Members that an Ordinary General Assembly has been called on:

- \* first convocation on 2023, June 30 at 7 am CEST;
- \* second convocation on 2023, July 1 at 6 pm CEST.

The Ordinary IDC Members' International General Assembly will be held in Merigar West and also streamed in audio-video with all the other seats of IDC Gars/Lings/Independent Lings.

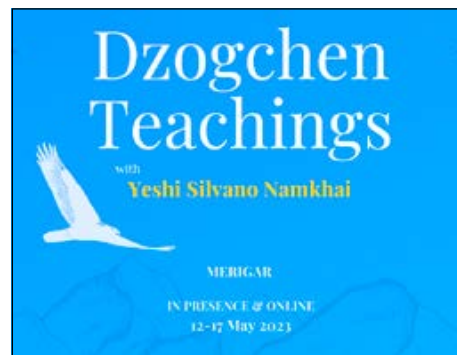
### Agenda

1. Presentation of membership trends.
2. Approval of the financial statement for the year 2022.
3. Approval of both the budget and the proposal for a program of IDC activities for the year 2023.
4. Organizational bodies of IDC. Communication and – when needed – renewal with reference to:
  - \* The International Gakyil members and assistants.
  - \* The College of Gekös (College of Guarantors).
  - \* The Auditor.
5. Any other business.

All IDC Members who have the right to participate in the International General Assembly and who are unable to attend in person may appoint another member to represent him/her by a written proxy. Every member may represent the votes for a maximum of three other IDC Members.

The Board of Directors (IG)

Associazione International Dzogchen Community  
Località Merigar 1, 58031 Arcidosso  
(Grosseto, Italy – C.F. 92077880539)



## Thank You

**D**ear Members of the International Dzogchen Community,  
Greetings from the International Gakyil.

We are deeply grateful to Yeshe Namkhai for deepening our understanding of the unique essence during his Dzogchen Teachings retreat that took place May 12 through May 17, 2023.

In-person and online participation were high.

In-person: approximately **1000**  
The average unique viewer connections during the May 2023 retreat were as follows:  
Webcast: **9343**  
Zoom: worldwide **1241**, China **1641**  
Languages: Spanish, German, Russian, Czech, French, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Polish, Japanese and Chinese.

Refreshed, we now take responsibility for ourselves and apply what we were taught.

Thank you to all those who participated in organizing and running the retreat!

With love,  
The International Gakyil







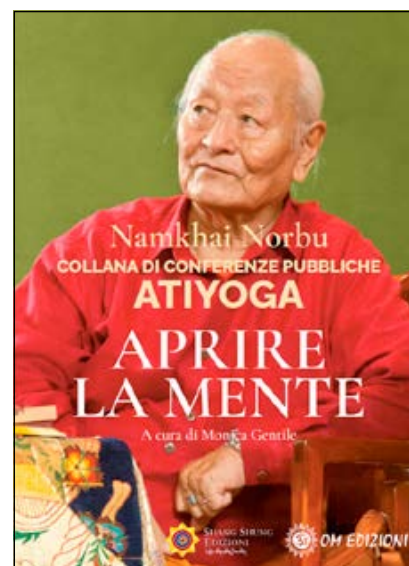
### In English



This book is one of the earliest books on Dzogchen authored by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu and it was originally conceived

con video (mp4) scaricabile gratuitamente su insegnamenti pubblici di Atiyoga ATI-YOGA Collana di Conferenze Pubbliche

L'infaticabile attività di insegnamento dell'autore Namkhai Norbu (1938–2018) non era basata su un intento missionario, ossia su uno sforzo per cercare di promuovere una filosofia o una religione, un tentativo di convincere, istruire, indottrinare e fare proseliti. Piuttosto era il contrario: com'egli stesso spiegava con grande chiarezza, insegnare una certa filosofia o predicare un



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children, paying special attention to the physical dimension, energy and breathing of growing girls and boys.

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

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## Upcoming books

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### The Cuckoo of Rigpa

An Ancient Dunhuang Manuscript.

*Rig pa'i 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 Tibetan 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

### The Vajra Dance of Space

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

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](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](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](mailto:info@shangshungpublications.com)

Shang Shung Publications Team



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## Did You Know That You Can Even Sponsor a Young Monk?

**S**horten the distance, sponsor a young monk from Tashi Choeling or Nghagyur Sangngh Choeling Monastery

In Nepal, in 2021 ASIA started a long-distance sponsorship project in the Tashi Choeling and Nghagyur Sangngh Choeling monasteries, where numerous young Himalayan monks are being educated following the basic Nepalese school curriculum and studying Tibetan language and history, fundamentals of dharma and meditation.

Unfortunately, today the education of these Himalayan children and young people, as well as the survival of the monasteries themselves and the ancient Buddhist teachings, is at risk. Find out why by reading about the history of the two monasteries below and how you, too, can shorten the distance by sponsoring a young monk from Tashi Choeling or Nghagyur Sangngh Choeling Monastery.

### The Tashi Choeling Monastery

Tashi Choeling Monastery was founded by Gopal Lama in 1993 in Kaski district (Pokhara, Nepal) on the shore of Lake Pewa.

Today, it houses 60 young monks between the ages of 10 and 16 who, unfortunately, live in very precarious conditions: classes are held outside, on a few communal tables and chairs in a large sheet metal shed, typical of the temporary houses after the 2015 earthquake.

The families of the children admitted to the monastery are unable to provide any financial assistance, and Gopal Lama's income, which comes from rituals and donations, is insufficient to guarantee its students' basic needs, and educational and healthcare expenses.

### The Nghagyur Monastery

The Nghagyur Sangngh Choeling Monastery was founded in 1996 by a lama called Gupti Gurung in the city of Pokhara, Nepal,



at the foot of Sarangkot Hill, in the locality called Pipaldali Thumke.

Initially, the monastery only housed the lama and his family, but as the number of requests from poorer families increased, the structure was enlarged to also house young monks and provide them with an education in their language and culture.

However, Gupti Gurung is unable to meet all the necessary expenses alone, and the families of the children admitted to the monastery are among the poorest in the area: living on agriculture alone, they have difficulty making ends meet. In addition, many children are orphans or semi-orphans.

### What can you do?

Shorten the distance and make your long-distance sponsorship now! <https://www.adoptibet.org/wp/en/>

Thanks to your sponsorship, a young monk will have the opportunity to train in harmony with his cultural roots and you will contribute to keeping alive the invaluable heritage of knowledge and spirituality of the Tibetan people. In addition, you will be able to establish a real relationship with him, through exchanging letters and, possibly, by going to visit him one day! ©



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# Dzamling Gar News and Updates!

2022 and 2023 have been very interesting periods in the life of Dzamling Gar, in particular because after Rinpoche's passing many of us who were living and working in the Gar, felt like in a sleeping spell (except for Alix, the gardeners and the gardens which even during and after COVID kept on working and growing!).

All of the sudden, at the beginning of 2022, some groups of people came from different parts of the world to settle in Tenerife and, like pure magic, we started gathering, sharing impressions, brainstorming ideas and figuring out how to make them concrete. In a couple of months there were more than six groups that developed several projects, some which until nowadays are actively running and some which have been achieved. Communication, Collaboration and Gratitude have been the main basis with which all these projects have been carried out. Of course, discussions and disagreements have arisen many times, but we all recall, once and again, that it is part of the process to go through it, overcome it and keep on for personal and collective evolution. These collaborations have brought so much inspiration in us all, that even more people felt the motivation to participate.

This is a brief summary of some of the things taking place in Dzamling Gar in the last year and the coming months:

## Sangha Solution Meetings.

We held three Sangha Solution Meetings (SSM).

These meetings started in May 2022 and they are open meetings to discuss matters of interest and importance to the Dzamling Gar Community. Their goal is to enhance communication, collaboration, and participation; to make people better informed, to increase transparency, and to learn from each other, and as well to identify problems and find solutions together. The aim is to do this in a joyful way, with respect to each other. So far we have no date for the 4th one but people are always welcome to propose topics.

Sangha Solutions Overview:  
<https://bit.ly/3GOXN4Z>



Alix working on the final garden.

All photos by G Martinez

## 6 Month Program

After a long time, we managed to implement a six month in advance program for everyone to be able to organize themselves, save the dates and join our events, courses and retreats.

You can always access it through the UPCOMING PROGRAM section in our website [dzamlinggar.org](https://dzamlinggar.org)

## Monthly Open Gakyil Meetings

For transparency and for everyone to learn about problems, projects, plans, and resolutions taking place in Dzamling Gar, and participating in finding solutions and collaborating in more concrete ways, the Gakyil decided to hold Open Gakyil Meetings the last Wednesday of every month.

## Pre-AGM meetings

Coordinated by Anton Rutkowski, Gakyil, workers and collaborators volunteered to prepare a series of meetings before the Annual General Meeting (AGM) that took place on April the 15th. Four meetings took place in which several topics were explained in detail:

1. Presentation of the AGM 2023 project and Projects taking place in 2022 in Dzamling Gar
2. Legal Status
3. Being Dzamling Gar Gakyil
4. Financial Report

The meetings were a total success, members had a good chance to have a deep understanding of the current situation of the Global Gar and as a result, the AGM was smooth and transparent.

## ESPACIO Yoga Studio

Our studio is the more "open image" from which we share courses and events also in collaboration with other organizations with whom we share similar values.

More info: <https://dzamlinggar.net/yogastudio>



Meditation with Rabgyi in Espacio.

## Cafeteria New Floor and Renewal



New cafeteria floor.

» continued on the following page





New jogur.

» continued from previous page

### New Jogur

It is located near where the White Tent was.

### New Accommodation Booking Website

It will be launched in a couple of weeks, and it's been created on Karma Yoga basis by a group of IT professionals from our Community.

### New Website

Before the end of the summer we would like to launch our new website which is meant to make the user experience easier, both for members and the public.

### Swimming Pool Project

A team has been working on emptying the pool and reusing its water for gardening. After collecting information on technical details and inviting everyone who stayed at Dzamling Gar to **fill the Swimming Pool Survey** and analyzing the results, we hope to have a more clear understanding of the meaning of having the swimming pool actively running for those who visit Dzamling Gar. If you would like to be part of this project you can always **learn more**, and join the team!

### Final Gardens

With the incredible work of Alix, Nicola, and so many people who have contributed to the creation of Dzamling Gardens, we are soon to finish with the last of the gardens near the back gate. **Dzamling Gardens** are a piece of art in itself offering a full scents, colors, shapes and textures experience.

### Info Point and Shop

We started to move Info Point from where it was, near the area where the White Tent used to be. Why?

- \* So anyone can be welcomed properly by our kind Hirton.



Summer camp for children.

- \* To have our Shop near the main entrance.
- \* For security reasons (to see who is coming).
- \* And because we made it bigger so also our public books from the bookshop could be available.

There are more surprises coming connected to Info point and we are soon to do the grand opening.

### Wooden boards for public and renewal

Thanks to our efficient Maintenance Team, we managed to modify, renovate and move our beloved wooden board to the main entrance for people passing by to have all the information about our weekly activities and upcoming events.

### Yoga Kids Summer Camp

Being one of the latest projects coordinated by our dearest Nataly Nitsche, during July we will host a summer camp for kids from 4 to 11 years-old. "Discovering myself through yoga (Kumar Kumari or Yantra Yoga for children)" will offer activities like Kumar Kumari, mindfulness, collaborative games, crafts, nature exploration, storytelling and lots of fun!

For more information:

<http://bitly.ws/Fq3F>

### 10 Years Anniversary

On November 18th 2023 Dzamling Gar will turn 10 years since Rinpoche and the whole Community celebrated its inauguration in 2013. Dzamling Gar, the Global Gar, is your Gar so we **would love it if you could join us for the celebrations taking place on the 2nd and 3rd of December 2023**. The celebrations will consist of a two day program for the IDC and the General Public to participate.

Stay updated cause soon we are releasing the invitation!



New Infopoint.

### 6 months Program

If you would like to collaborate in any of these projects, you are always welcome, either with Karma Yoga, as a Project Manager of some event, sharing thoughts and ideas or doing any offer according to your possibilities, we will be the most grateful. You can send us an email to [blue.gakyil@dzamlinggar.net](mailto:blue.gakyil@dzamlinggar.net).

And, of course, one of our goals is to make Dzamling Gar self-sustainable. For this we need some of these projects to move ahead, if you would like to support us financially, and according to your possibilities, you can access <https://bit.ly/43IAxzh>.

We are always very grateful for any kind of collaboration!

Finally, one of our visitors recently shared his impression on how amazed he was at seeing how so many people present at Dzamling Gar are so actively collaborating (both long and short term), with such hard work to do but enjoying together. He also said it is clear that people really keep Rinpoche in their hearts. Of course it is Rinpoche's precious gift of the Teachings, the daily discovery of what Sangha means, the tireless work of the Namkhai Family, and this precious place that makes everything move ahead.

We are so grateful that people come, that we meet again, that they take part in courses, events, stay at the houses, help on some task, meet and enjoy Friday dinners in the cafeteria, etc.

Thanks to you everyone, Dzamling Gar, its gardens, and its Gönpa, are living places where children can play, grownups can rest, we all can practice, newcomers can keep on joining, and tourists and the public can create a connection with the Teachings. With all of us concretely integrating the real sense of Collaboration, the greater purpose for which this place was built will be able take place. ©



# ESPACIO Yoga Studio

Dzamling Gar, Tenerife  
Interview with Natalie Nitsche  
and Alina Kramina  
June 16, 2023

*Nataly Nitsche and Alina Kramina are the founders of ESPACIO Yoga Studio in Playa Paraiso, inside Dzamling Gar. The Mirror talks to them about this unique public venture of Espacio Yoga Studio in collaboration with the Dzamling Gar Dzogchen Community.*

**The Mirror:** The first question we have is what was the impetus for the beginning of ESPACIO?

**Alina:** The impetus came from the experience of teaching Yantra Yoga in Dzamling Gar where on a regular basis you have completely new people without transmission who come and want to join the class for practitioners with transmission. Normally these people have no particular knowledge of what this place is but they are clearly interested in learning and doing yoga with us.

So we felt like it was time to offer a Yantra Yoga program for the local people and tourists. We have many things that can be taught publicly: Yantra Yoga, Kumar Kumari, Soft Yantra and on the chair, Prenatal Yantra, Respira Method, Khaita and other activities.

**Nataly:** I think ESPACIO was born as result of Dzamling Gar becoming gradually more open to the wider public over the last few years. And we knew if there are local people interested in what we do, we had to provide not only a regular yoga program for them but also a dedicated place. The problem was that activities were inconsistent. Classes were often moved from one space to another depending on other activities or big retreats. Sometimes there was regularity, sometimes there was not.

Jya Kyip, a hall under the Cafeteria, was actually pretty much under-used for a long time. There were just a few Khaita rehearsals once in a while because of the large mirrors. We thought it could be used for this project.

**M:** So it was primarily the two of you who created the idea of a yoga studio?



Alina (left) and Nataly in Espacio Studio.

Photo by G Martinez

**Alina:** Primarily, yes. We talked with other Yantra Yoga instructors about this idea. Then we presented the concept to the Gakyil, they liked it and offered us to come back with a full project proposal. As Nataly said, Jya Kyip was a good place but it was not ready and required a lot of renovation. At that moment we decided yes, we can do it, or at least we can start and then see how it will go, of course with the support of the Gakyil, other instructors and actually, many people.

Nataly and I are managing the studio but the team is bigger. Besides us there are more teachers: Alessandra, Rabgyi, Naomi, Valeria, Max, Elerin. Also, there has always been at least one person who helps to maintain the space in a tidy way and welcome people. We often have to cover each other because things change or people have to travel.

**M:** So you said that one of the impetuses was that there weren't enough regular yoga classes or activities and it wasn't consistent. Did you also have an idea about promotion to the outside to bring people in, to open up our system of yoga to the local community?

**Nataly:** Yes, of course. And I think the concept of a yoga studio is much easier to understand for people not from the Community. For example, sometimes people enter the Gar and the garden and they are just like, wow, what is this place? And then you start to explain all the things that happen here and it becomes like a big thing be-

cause it involves so many people, so much activity and so many different aspects.

Of course, I felt that Dzamling Gar could be overwhelming. Visitors were surprised; they didn't really know how to relate to this place, like what can I do here. Of course, we invite people to courses and activities, but I noticed a very different response when you tell them that there's a yoga studio and a cafeteria. Everyone knows what a yoga studio is. So as a concept it is really clear for people, and it's inviting. People know what to expect when they arrive at a yoga studio. They know there are classes of yoga, maybe other things that are also connected with well-being, like other workshops and other classes, not only yoga, it can be dance, etc, but it's a very clear concept for most people. So I think that's a very good advantage of having this kind of doorway for people.

**M:** So you were the primary movers for the renovation work. You engaged other people, but you really worked very hard to prepare the space and to work on the physical aspect of the space.

**Nataly:** Regarding the renovation, I think at the beginning we, for sure I, underestimated the amount of work we needed to do, especially because as soon as we cleaned one part, we would take something out to see what is underneath and that would also need to be cleaned. So it took longer than we thought. Altogether it took around one month.

» continued on the following page

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**Alina:** We were here almost everyday, coming and doing something. We received help, of course. Rabgyi and a lot of people came to help. We had a lot of karma yogis and work exchange workers, we made a call a few times and people came to help and some of them committed and stayed until it was done. Also other Yantra Yoga instructors were helpful. I think it was really a collaboration because only two of us wouldn't have managed it. It's quite a challenging and big space and it's become very beautiful and the energy is really nice.

**M:** How is it going now as far as programming and how do you promote it? What is the most effective way for promotion?

**Alina:** We began with the Open Day in October 2022 and it was really a great experience. We made the program to present what we were going to do in ESPACIO. That day we gave short introductory sessions of Yantra Yoga, Respira Method, Meditation with Rabgyi, Sound healing with Tibetan bowls, and offered healthy snacks with refreshments. A lot of people from outside came but also many of our Community people, which I think was important, because we wanted them to know that this project is for them as well. Around 55 people came in total, the place was full, and many people helped. From the beginning we decided to start slowly, just to make sure that we could manage the commitment and ensure regularity. In the new season we are ready to take it to the next level.

**Nataly:** Until now it has mostly been word of mouth that brought people, but we also advertised through Instagram and we have a WhatsApp group. We also charge a fee for the classes and we decided on these rates based on what is available around. We did research on what other yoga studios and other yoga teachers are charging and positioned ourselves accordingly.

Also we offer a package at a 50% discount for the first month. So that is a motivation for people to try because to really try it out, you need more than one time. So at the beginning, the first month is really cheap. And then we have packages for different numbers of classes. And we have discounts for Community members as well.

**M:** Do you feel that things are going well, that it has been successful? Do you see where you need to maybe improve certain aspects of the situation or how you perceive the future?

**Alina:** Over this time we have seen that there is demand for a place like this. In our part of the island there are not many yoga studios, and people are often excited when they discover there is a yoga class here. Another thing, we are happy that finally there is simple and always available program that we can offer to the new people who enter the Gar and ask questions about the place.

On the other hand, there are many things to align and develop. For sure, ESPACIO has strong potential but a lot of work has to be done if we want to see it growing. First of all communication and promotion.

**M:** It would be nice if you could have one person to focus just on the publicity, wouldn't it?

**Alina:** Yes, absolutely. Now we are ready to advertise our program more, organize more courses and receive a bigger flow of people from outside. It took us time to set up all the necessary processes needed for consistency.

**Nataly:** We also feel ready to expand our schedule. With more classes we will have more people. At the moment we have five classes a week, taught by different instructors. Not everyone could commit for a long time, sometimes one of us had to travel and we had to cover each other. Keeping a stable program was a challenge at some point, but somehow we managed to maintain it. The classes are always running and we had almost no cancellations of classes all this time.

**M:** That is really great. Can we ask you a little bit about the reaction of people from outside to this particular system of yoga?

**Nataly:** Actually it seems that we really haven't had a lot of people who came and then never came back. I think that is a good point. I also think that sometimes we have higher expectations than the people who come because we have been trained in a very specific, very precise way, which is really good, but probably it's not the same expectation that a person who comes to a yoga studio has. They just want to move a little, they feel that they open their breath and feel more relaxed and they are really

grateful to have this place and to be able to do something good for their health.

But it's also true that for us, teachers, it is a little challenging to teach Yantra Yoga gradually in classes. Because we learned in a different way, in the form of an intensive course, where you lay the foundation and participate in a course from beginning to an end. And we understand that when people come to a yoga studio, things are different, they might miss classes because they have things to do, so we need to find the way to navigate this.

Our idea is to start with monthly introductory workshops so that people can have a class where they can come listen from the beginning, to have an idea about the whole method and how it works.

**Alina:** Yes, also there is division by languages and levels. We have Yantra Yoga classes for beginners, one in English and one in Spanish, there is an intermediate class in English. When we began people advised us to have more Spanish classes, because we are in Spain, but the great majority of people who come here are foreigners, tourists, because we are in the south of Tenerife where many foreigners live and most speak English.

**M:** Do you want to talk a little bit about the other programming that you offer here, like some other workshops you've had and you also have weekly meditation?

**Nataly:** The weekly meditation is a very important part of our program and is taught by Rabgyi. He has been doing this for a long time regularly and then it was incorporated into the yoga studio program. It's a session that is offered by donation and anyone can come. It is a very consistent activity and these sessions are really nice. People enjoy it a lot.

And also after the classes, we talk a little bit about the space, if people need information, so we try to be here. There's usually a moment where there are a lot of questions. Once someone asked me about the big crystal house up there, meaning the Gónpa, that beautiful crystal house. And then you say, yes, we can go to the crystal house, because it's an amazing place. We tell them they can come and dance Khaita or just come and enter. And so people slowly come and start to understand this amazing place and become more at ease.

**Alina:** There are other activities in ESPACIO beside Yantra Yoga. There is a class on gentle stretching and Respira Method, which is a system of breathing exercises inspired by

Yantra Yoga, created by Fabio Andrico. This is a great opportunity for people who are not very familiar with breathing in general and who maybe have some physical limitations and don't feel like practicing Yantra Yoga to have this experience.

Then besides that, we have had some other classes and workshops offered by our community members: voice training classes with Alexandru Anton and more workshops on this subject with Ekaterina Valeeva Farrington; mandala painting workshop with our Community artist Simona Marziani, qigong classes with John Groeneveld, Sound and movement healing with Miriam Brusa, Face yoga, with Dina Priymak and a homemade cosmetics workshop with Iryna Maidanchuk. We had a number of different classes and for this reason this place is not called a Yantra Yoga Studio, but ESPACIO Yoga Studio, because we wanted it to be a space that brings together different public activities that Dzamling Gar as a community can offer.

**Nataly:** We are also interested to rent it to some other people who could teach other styles of yoga here so that ESPACIO becomes more like an exchange space, although primarily we want to use it as a possibility to speak more about Yantra Yoga and bring more awareness. Also inside Yantra Yoga we have some other related forms like Soft Yantra, or Yantra Yoga in the chair. We have Prenatal Yoga that now is in the regular schedule and it's a class that is just starting. And of course we will have a class of Kumar Kumari for the next season as well.

The starting point for introducing Kumar Kumari is a Kids Yoga Camp in July. That is presented for the public and is a collaboration between Dzamling Gar and ESPACIO Yoga Studio. So it is our first child focused activity and then we plan to continue with the Kumar Kumari classes regularly as well.

Once we have a more complete and solid program of Yantra Yoga so that it's very clear that this is our main focus, we plan to also have Hatha Yoga classes by local teachers. This will bring more life and more connections and interactions and make ESPACIO a really open and transparent space. That is very important. Hence the name ESPACIO. I think the inspiration was that the ESPACIO as the space, as the elements, that can eventually offer everything you need. It really has a great potential.

**M:** To conclude, maybe we can ask how you envision things for the future?

**Alina:** As for the plans for the future.. the ESPACIO project is not separate from Dzamling Gar, it is part of it and now things are changing here. It has been a private period for some years after our Master passed away, and during the pandemic Dzamling Gar was much less open to the public. But now it's time to open again. In this gradual process many parts are coming together now. The whole entrance area is being renovated to receive new people: a bigger Inforpoint House with DzaShop, renovated Cafeteria, informational stands, ESPACIO fits there very well. I think our intention for the future is to set up all necessary processes for seamless work with other parts of the Dzamling Gar infrastructure, to direct new people to other activities like Tibetan Medicine courses and treatments, Vajra Dance and Khaita, Welbeing retreats, other open activities. Also to organize events together with local authorities.

**Nataly:** Yoga Studio is an easy concept, but in the practice it is a big responsibility for us, because we know that whatever happens here represents us (Dzogchen Community). And so we want to be very careful, when we decide what activities to offer, what is our intention? Of course, we understand that we need to find a balance, not to be too rigid and or too open and flexible. So even if we want to be very open, and share with other people, we still have to care for what this space is and that is a challenge.

**M:** So do you feel like you have enough help or would you like to engage more of the Community and local instructors to help manifest the activities here?

**Alina:** As we said before we opened we decided to go slowly to make sure that we have energy to continue the project and don't burn out. However there is a lot of work to do. We would like to see a receptionist joining our team. At the moment there is someone helping with cleaning which is great, but also there is accounting, planning, promotion, maintenance, many things.

**M:** Do you have anything else you want to add?

**Nataly:** There is a plan but probably not for the very near future. It's a good project and was something that was mentioned by Rinpoche, and it is the fact of having collaboration with the local hotels to offer classes in the hotels. So while it's not something for the near future because there are many more things to establish here, it could work, once everything is running in a more stable way. I think it's perfect to come to the hotels, especially the nearby hotels, as an established yoga center and offer our services. It could be a really a good fit. And we already did some research and discovered that many hotels don't have yoga classes. (laughs)

**M:** Thank you so much Alina and Nataly for all you are doing with ESPACIO for the Dzogchen Community, for Dzamling Gar, for Yantra Yoga and also for the time you took to do this interview with The Mirror. ☺



## THE MIRROR

Newspaper of the  
International

Dzogchen Community of  
Chögyal Namkhai Norbu

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# Listening, Reflecting and Moving Forward

Merigar Gakyil

The retreat with Yeshe Namkhai is over. For months, ever since we learned that there would be a retreat, we would meet, in presence and on zoom, trying to imagine what it would be like, how to organize ourselves, and what kind of response we could expect from the Community.

We had as a basis the blueprints of the many very popular retreats with Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, but the situation was not the same, for so many reasons, and so we tried to use our imagination and common sense. We helped each other and asked for help from practitioners who had been involved in the organization in the past... in short, it was a fantastic and exciting challenge. We knew everyone's eyes were on us, and we tried to do our best.

The retreat was exceptional and although the weather was inclement, with

almost continuous rain for all six days, it did not affect the joy of all the participants in the slightest. The rain, a mere detail, was almost insignificant.

Everyone's fatigue and commitment were no less real, however; without wishing to forget or underestimate the work of none of the almost one hundred karmayogis who brought this event to life, with their great commitment.

Now we have all taken a moment to reflect, to recover from the physical and emotional exhaustion that such an intense Teaching retreat always brings. Such an essential Transmission and Teaching gives us all the opportunity to deepen the meaning and value of the Dzogchen Community to which we belong. And now?

It is not easy to say what expectations were placed on this retreat, certainly different from person to person. But the fact remains that we listened to Yeshe Namkhai's Teachings with emotion and with the knowledge that we were all immersed in the Transmission, in the continuation of what Chögyal Namkhai Norbu taught for almost fifty years.

Listening is the first step, followed by reflection, which will be individual and collective and will take a period of time that cannot be foreseen; however, we have received clear and precious indications, on practice and on our being a Community. We hope that these reflections will be fruitful and bring an incentive and the joy to move forward in practice and to manifest its fruits in the world of which we are a part.

At Merigar we will model our programmes of activities in accordance with what we have understood from the words of Yeshe Namkhai; we will seek to enhance the enormous legacy of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu preserved in the Merigar Archives, making it available in an organic and coherent manner.

We will continue to give value to Merigar's resources by making them more productive and making Merigar more and more beautiful, autonomous and enjoyable for all. We will put ourselves at the service of all those who wish to share our values and to follow this path of personal growth with us. ©



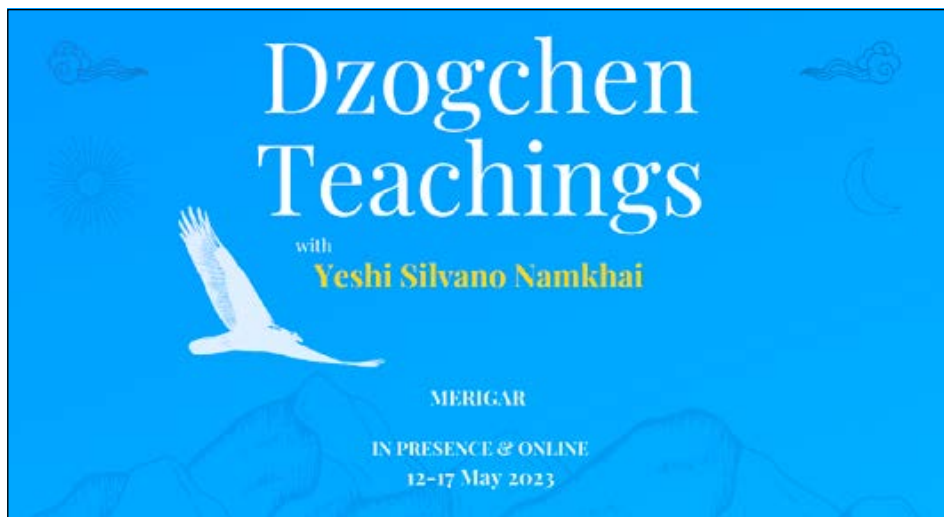
# Keeping the Three Doors Open

Dzogchen Teachings with  
Yeshi Namkhai at Merigar

Merigar West, the first Gar of the Dzogchen Community founded by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu in the rugged green hills of Tuscany, was the venue for the recent and much awaited retreat of Dzogchen Teachings given by his son, Yeshi Namkhai. The six day retreat, which was held from May 12 to 17, 2023, was the first major international event to take place since the passing of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu in September 2018 and was enthusiastically attended in person by more than 1,000 participants from across the globe, from the Americas, through Europe, across the Steppes to China, with another almost 2,000 webcast and 8,000 zoom connections online each day. The teaching was given in Italian with translations into English, Spanish, Japanese, Hungarian, Russian, Czech, French, Chinese, Ukrainian, Polish, and German.

The unpredictable spring weather which brought copious rain and winter temperatures throughout the entire time did not manage to dampen the joy of those present at Merigar for this unique event. Although the weather created some immediate obstacles such as washing out the large parking area, the retreat organizers had meticulously taken measures for various scenarios, among others creating a map with a number of smaller areas for cars spread along the country road passing through the Gar. There were also shuttle vehicles for transport between the main road and the Gar and to help those with less mobility arrive at the Gönpa.

As the number of people attending was expected to be high for the infrastructure of Merigar, detailed planning started from February onwards to accommodate a large number of people and their needs over the six day period. Since the space inside the Merigar Temple of Great Liberation was not sufficient for all, another two spaces were organized to seat participants, outside the Gönpa, and in a large tent with an enormous video screen. Retreatants received blue, red, or yellow bracelets, each color indicating their seating for individual teaching sessions in rotation. It seemed com-



pllicated the first day but worked out well throughout the whole retreat.

The organization was meticulously managed by almost 100 volunteers divided into various teams taking care of the many aspects that made the retreat run smoothly and comfortably for all: helping people to park, welcoming people with hot tea, snacks, and breakfast, the lunch team, cleaning, caring for the Gönpa, communications which included two WhatsApp groups for instant messaging, the Merigar Info team, registration, and the Ganapuja team. The local Arcidosso town council was also very helpful and provided a free shuttle vehicle for the duration of the retreat and regularly removed the rubbish.

Most notable was the joyful and peaceful atmosphere among all those participating who, in spite of the extreme meteorological challenges, remained cheerful and collaborative and were a major factor in the smooth running of the entire event.

Over ten sessions of teaching given in the Temple of Great Contemplation, Yeshi Namkhai spoke about different aspects of the Dzogchen Teaching that many of the retreat participants were already familiar with, but based on his own experience and in a way that enabled those with some understanding to refresh their practice and view. He had prepared an extensive and



The English translator, Alessandra Policreti.

detailed program that covered different aspects related to his own personal experience and presented it in a simple direct way. As he explained in the first session of Teaching, the objective of this program was to allow people who were listening to the Teachings for the first time to reach a certain knowledge as well as those who had been following for some years to acquire a base.

The retreat closed with the singing of the Song of the Vajra and a standing ovation from all those present which lasted for several minutes and showed how valuable and meaningful these precious Dzogchen Teachings are for all those who follow them.

On behalf of all those who followed this retreat in person or online in their homes, we would like to extend our profound thanks to all those who were involved in the organization that made this event possible. But most of all we extend our deepest gratitude to Yeshi Namkhai for sharing his experience and knowledge with us without limits. It has been an important and significant moment for us all. ©



# The Sangha as a Mirror of the World

Oana Marcu

There is something we rarely bring out about Merigar East in public communications: our hard times. We write out news trying to stay positive and attract community members: if they come to us, they will have good times.

But in smaller meetings or over a beer with other gakyil friends, we do share some of the struggles. We are struggling. The main reason can be called “lack of participation”. It seems that our worldwide Sangha does not have right now as much energy as needed to infuse the numerous places it economically maintains. We lack a red gakyil, a gekö, members of the board of advisors, project managers and karma yogis in general. We have been working now for many years understaffed, thus building tensions and exhaustion. We are keeping up, alternating burn out and rest every three year stint.

Running a Gar requires capacity, dedication and will. Still, we often end up in the gakyil because “someone has to do it/ no one offered to do it”.

We take for granted that there was a wish to create a community, shared by everyone, not just by our Master. But now we wonder to what extent our members believe in and wish to co-manage communities and physical spaces? I wish we could bring everyone to the big courtyard of Merigar East, look each other in the eyes and take decisions together. But it is difficult to look 600 people in the eye (that's the approximate number of practitioners in the Merigar East Sangha). It is difficult to imagine a meeting where 600 people can all have a say. As a sociologist I believe in the potential of conversational formats for large groups, but bringing all the Sangha together here remains in the realm of fantasy unless our Teacher has mercy on us and decides to have a retreat here! So, we establish more realistic goals, such as having more than 30% of the Sangha open our emails, or more than 10% of them answering an opinion survey with five questions.

I am dreaming of participatory decision making, while our Annual assemblies feel a bit like faking it, with around 1% of the members participating. I am dreaming of connecting with our ling's gakyils and working



together, but right now I am having a hard time getting answers to emails. I would love us to have an open international space for listening and making plans together. Right now, although IDC gakyil has been supportive and helpful, they are fatigued too and need help. Also, we are not sure what kind of support we should expect from overarching organisations such as ATIF.

Is our Sangha a mirror of a world that is fast paced, overstressed and eternally lacking time? Just like in the wider world, national divisions and ideas about “us” and “them” are born: “we need to think first about OUR place/people/territory, then to think about the others”. Conservation and protection of our property seem to be a current mood, more than enthusiasm, expansion and the worldwide cosmopolitanism of our bright beginnings.

We are thinking about ourselves these days, as we are revising our marketing identity. What can our input be in the busy community schedule of 5–15 online events every day? How much effort can we still put into making Merigar East a desirable

place to be? How can we promote the place and the teachings to a Romanian public, in the face of an overflowing offer of spiritual products and services?

Driven by Migmar's confident and steady input, we managed to pull off a big project, the Gönpa Renovation, that took place as an artistic summer camp last summer and will continue this year. We have received support from our donors and voluntary work from young artists. We know we can do it!

But we need help. We need people who can believe! We need people who are courageous enough to dream! We need people who can take matters in their hands and drive enthusiasm! Bring your energy to Merigar East! Let's start spinning and, like a centrifuge, everything will start to move with us.

Write to us. We listen. We read.

We answer.

©

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# Solar Energy for Merigar East

Merigar East friends

The sun radiates light and heat, which makes it possible for life to exist on earth. All the energy radiates out from the center of our solar system in the form of light, heat, gamma and x-rays, and magnetic fields. Every day the light of the Sun shines on the Earth, driving many chemical and physical changes across the planet. But what would the sun be without water?

Support Merigar East, where the five elements manifest themselves more strongly, in transforming the energy of the powerful Black Sea sun! We are taking our first steps to introduce this source of energy at our Gar, to help us stabilize the pump for the water well.

In 2022 we invested around 1500 euro to diagnose and repair some problems to our Gar's electrical grid. With this we made the Gar safer but bitterly discovered that the energy fluctuations we are experiencing are

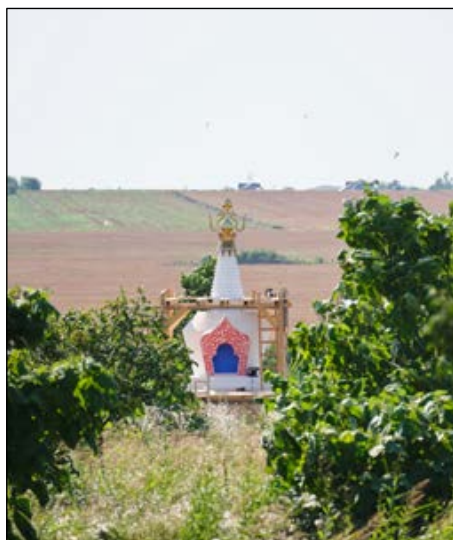
mainly due to the cable connecting us to the electricity distribution network, which would be too expensive to repair. An immediate solution we could afford, with your help, is a modest, additional power supply that could at least prevent water from being interrupted during these fluctuations.

We are getting a small setup of 3kw photovoltaic panels with a battery, to feed and stabilize the main well pump and the camping area. We need to gather 5000

euro in order to achieve this project. The well-being of our guests (and you can be among them) depends on it!

Support us by donating here! (<https://dzogchen.ro/wp/product/donation-for-solar-energy/>) With your contribution, we will transform money into light, light into water, water into life...

We welcome you to come and experience the openness that this unique place offers in abundance! ©



# Quiet Days at Kunsangar South

The days at Kunsangar South are quiet and peaceful now. Not many people have come to the Gar yet, although the summer season has started.

During the May holidays we held a Yantra Yoga retreat with Victor Krachkovskiy. Victor had been long awaited at Kunsangar South and was very warmly welcomed.

Within the framework of the Shang Shung Institute's project "All-good days of health", we organised medical visits from Vladimir Bakshi, doctor of Tibetan medicine, for guests at Kunsangar South.

Toilets and showers were inaugurated for guests staying at the camping site during the new summer season. Water tanks have been installed and filled with water for the water supply system of the Gar in preparation for the hot summer period.

There is a lot of work to be done at the Gar. In order to maintain the beauty of the territory, we organise seasonal mowing of the grass and need to take care of the nu-



merous plants. Volunteers are therefore always needed during the summer.

We remind you that every day at 8:30 (Moscow time) we continue to do Odzer Chenma practice for the peace around the globe. Connect in Zoom: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/5705776865>, password: KSTara.

You are always welcome at the Gar, no matter what!

With love,  
Kunsangar South Gakyil





# Summer Update from Kunsangar North

A sunny hello to all from Kunsangar North!

Spring came very early this year, the snow melted quickly, and now the Gar is again covered in green trees. And more and more practitioners are coming to the Gar – some for retreats, some as volunteers or karmayogis, some just to take a break from noisy Moscow.

The central event was, of course, the long awaited retreat with Yeshi Namkhai. A lot of people from all over Russia connected to the teachings via Zoom. Students from different cities came to the Gar. We again experienced that joyful state of coming together and uniting with the state of the master in Guruyoga! There were a lot of new people who came to the Gar to receive the transmission together, and some of them joined the Community.

During the retreat there were many activities at the Gar under the guidance of our instructors: we danced Vajra Dance with Tanya Pronicheva, Olya Nimachuk and Tanya Gerasimova, did Yantra Yoga with Ira Novikova, and in the evenings Sasha Gomonov explained the base of Santi Maha Sangha and some practices to beginners. Everyone was very joyful.

It was as if the retreat with Yeshi had breathed new life into the Gar. And immediately a project arose: the restoration of the outer walls at Rinpoche's house. How amicably and joyfully the karma yogis worked at it! At the same time, work on the restoration and painting of our Stupa of Perfect Victory is taking place. It will be covered in sacred syllables and symbols from inside. In addition, thanks to the generosity of some sponsors, we began the restoration of the sangkhang.

There are many old trees in the forest near the Gar. It takes great skill to put down a dried-up tree. We often get help from locals, just because we are good neighbours.

Very soon we will have a festival to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Gar. We are now actively preparing for it. We have also decided to refurbish old Vajra Dance mandalas and order new ones as more and more new people are showing interest in this practice. And we hope very much that with time new instructors will also appear. The practice of Vajra Dance is very popular at the Gar, and we regularly hold Dance retreats.



This spring Santi Maha Sangha instructor Sasha Gomonov came to the Gar several times. We practiced a lot, studied, discussed and danced with him. It was very interesting and useful.

With the onset of the warm weather we began to hold regular Sang and Serkyem practices at the stupa as well as practices of long thun. The stupa is becoming more and more famous among local people and more people are coming to it to circumambulate and make wishes and some believe they can improve their health.

Thank you to everyone who cares and supports the life of the Gar and the spirit of the Community.



We look forward to seeing you. You are always very welcome at the Gar.

With love,  
Kunsangar North Gakyil







## Coming Back to Tashigar North

Anjani Santos

After 10 years, life has brought me back to Tashigar Norte. The place where with 8 years old I was already learning the mudras for the Ganapuja. The place that I hold dear because it gifted me with precious experiences not only with my family, but with the Dzogchen community.

Last time I visited Venezuela was 4 years ago, in which I thought I was saying goodbye possibly forever but as life goes, things change and circumstances that were once blocked or closed open up again. Reminding me, as Rinpoche used to say, that everything is impermanent, good and bad things equally.

The Gar and its people welcomed us as if we hadn't left, as if we naturally came back to join their mandala. Being here reminds me the love for simple things and how grateful I am to sing the Song of the Vajra at the beach while looking at the immensity of the sky and the ocean like we used to do with Rinpoche back in the day. Now



that it's time to go, I leave wanting to have stay a little bit more.

I'm grateful to the people who stayed here "holding the fort", and who kept doing their best with the circumstances that were given to them. Eating, practicing and doing Karma Yoga with them was truly special. It's seems even symbolic to have repainted the Longsal symbol given that next year it will be 20 years since Rinpoche shared the Longsal teachings, including

Gomadevi, and now with the generosity of Prima Mai, Rita Renzi and Oliver Leick the intention to practice in Tashigar Norte arises once again. Please stay tuned for further news! Since the Gakyil is working on an in person program around Losar 2024! The Gar is like its symbol, the turtle endured through time, and it's now getting ready to host a most special celebration. ©



# Healers in the Dzogchen Community

## Untying the Knot in the Throat

Alexandru Anton from Romania talks about his work to support people in discovering their voice and identifying the subtle mental judgements that block the free flow of voice energy.

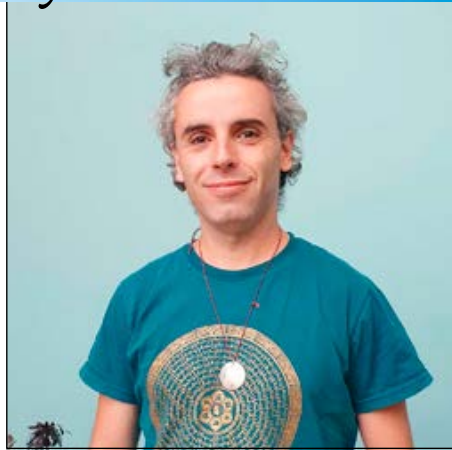
**The Mirror:** Alex, how did you get involved in working with the voice?

**Alex:** I remember when I was very young, maybe 4 or 5, how I would be fascinated by the live musicians playing on the meadow of the village of my maternal grandmother in Romania. Those were occasions when the whole village would dress up and gather in order to celebrate some important Christian holiday. Everybody, from young to very old, would join hand in hand for the many circle dances – some fast, some slow, some simple, some quite complex and some even acrobatic. When I look back at all this, I think all these holidays served as permissions and encouragement to actually celebrate the joy of being alive, together with others, through song and dance and maybe a little bit of organic country wine.

When I look back at the child fascinated by the musicians, I realize he was trying to discover the connection between sound and emotion. If we were from another galaxy and emotions were not an important part of our existence, this would all seem interesting or even strange. But to see, again and again, how all these people – each with their own busy hard-working lives, challenges, fights, suffering – gathered and through sound and movement shared that common space of joy, I think I found this quite miraculous. I still do.

I think this was actually the start for my passion for sound.

Then later, after I got my degree in Psychology and still didn't feel innerly satisfied, I participated in several traditional healing seminars with practitioners from different parts of the world and understood the importance of sound for moving the energy, releasing obstacles, and having new experiences. My first "acoustic love"



was Siberian throat-singing, which I still practice. I consider it to be an extraordinary method of working with energy.

**Mirror:** Did you have some background in music or in some type of therapy when you started your sound classes?

**Alex:** I had my Psychology training and a few dozen hours of therapeutic training, but overall it was mostly intellectual. I had very little life experience. I also had been practicing some hands-on energetic therapy on myself mostly. On the other hand, I also had quite a few experiences of using the voice in different healing contexts, according to different traditions. I consider these to be very valuable, because they brought me a lot of confidence on the level of energy, of dealing with my feelings and expressing them. Before this, I had a rather shy and inhibited nature. Then a friend of mine asked me to help him transcribe some notes from a throat-singing workshop where I had been the translator. He felt I had some understanding about the sound and the whole method and he suggested that I offer one voice training class to see how it goes – basically for sharing with others what I had discovered. I called that first workshop "Untying the knot in the throat" because I felt there was so much potential for the human voice underneath all the psychological filters, layers and self-censorship. As I was beginning to taste in my personal experience. That was in 2012 and I have been doing this ever since.

**Mirror:** Do you feel that working with sound is linked in some way to contemplation and to the DC teaching?

**Alex:** Definitely! It goes both ways. As poor as my contemplation practice may be, I think any progress also reflects in my workshops. I think one cannot really separate them. It is working with my body, energy and mind in both cases. For example, if I first use the voice to release some blocked energy from my body, and then I do some formal practice which involves singing mantras, I can feel that the vibration of my voice is spreading more easily in my body. My energy is already more settled and open from singing, so I can more easily go to the mind level and hopefully beyond.

This is very useful for me also because I still have a lot of repressed feelings which I normally cannot integrate in my daily life and cannot express – and that accumulates and fills up my inner space. So singing is also like brushing my teeth or having a shower on another level. I think in this way singing definitely is connected with developing more clarity.

On another level, singing helps with the psychological blocks. For example, if you have the intention to produce sounds for ten minutes without any stops and you do it, you will become aware of your self-judgement and also particularly of your own energy and voice – so that can help with the mind level and integrating more with the voice.

**Mirror:** Do you work only with voice/throat or also instruments?

**Alex:** I also work with instruments on the side, sometimes. It can be drums, flutes, jaw harps. Sometimes I play for an hour and people lie down, relaxing in the sound. I am not really interested in being a musician in that sense, although I have a few recordings and I enjoy it a lot when I can express some feeling or inner landscape through sound and share it with others. That is another process.

Right now I am more motivated to support people to discover their voice. I also think this can be more useful, because people work with themselves, with their own voice, rather than passively listening to some sounds. But of course listening is also very important and it has been one of

my challenges along the way. Somehow, listening is part of singing. If I cannot perceive something, what can I sing?

**Mirror:** Do you have some particular methods that you use during healing sessions?

**Alex:** I find singing to be the best method, once we remember and realize how easy, simple, yet powerful it is. It is an acoustic continuation of one's breath, which also more concretely resonates in one's own body. I use this metaphor of the human body as a musical instrument. We have the vocal cords and we have also the chamber of resonance, the space in which we allow our voice to resonate in the body. In order for this resonance space to be available, open, for the voice, the energetic body needs to be relaxed and free of tensions, otherwise emotions stuck in the body act as absorbing barriers for the inner vibrations of the voice.

Different organs and bones have different natural resonances, so for example if you talk from your head or from your heart or from your belly, your voice will include those frequencies. They will naturally resonate with the respective parts in the other people's bodies. So it becomes like a huge symphony! Isn't it wonderful to be aware of this? Then we also have the "muscle" of the voice, which is the diaphragm muscle and the energetic center of the solar plexus. It is important to remember this as an experience and use it as a resource, as opposed to putting effort in the throat and straining the vocal cords. I use whatever methods are necessary and suitable for the people I am working with, from somatic releasing of tensions to vocal expression of different emotions and awareness practices to identify the subtle mental judgements which block the free flow of our voice energy.

**Mirror:** Can you describe how a session with sounds works?

**Alex:** There are several possibilities. One is when the participants tend to be more passive and just listen to the sounds I am producing using my voice and different instruments. This is good for relaxing, releasing stress, and getting in touch with one's body in a meditative manner. But, as I said earlier, I prefer to engage with participants in an interactive way, to be able to explore and discover different aspects in the present moment.

In any case, we start with a body warm-up and tension-release. For example, by shaking the body and breathing

deeply. This helps to gather our presence in all our aspects. Bringing the breath in the body, bringing the mind in the breath and in the body...

In the context of a group, we also explore the phenomenon called resonance, where we sing together in resonance. It is a very simple thing, yet so few people know about it. Unless one is in a choir or something like that. While singing in resonance with somebody, it is impossible to tell which is my voice and which is the other person's voice and there is a very interesting experience of being together in the



same energetic flow. Participants said they enjoyed this very much. It is a unique way of practicing authentic connection with those around us and it involves both expressing and listening at the same time, in a synchronized way.

**Mirror:** Are your sound healing sessions evolving or adapting to the participants?

**Alex:** Yes. I do my best to work with what is manifesting in the present. I have many exercises in my "bag" and I use whatever I feel is suitable.

I will take this opportunity to clarify a bit about "sound healing". The term emphasizes more the external aspect, as if the inner problems are magically "healed" by some sounds coming from the outside. I would like to add that the person receiving sound therapy is actually very much responsible for the whole process. I can only offer the "space" of possibilities through my attitude, trigger and stimulate the natural process of activating the energy through various exercises and explanations. It is

actually the participant who "decides" how much they want to open, how committed they want to be when doing the exercises. It depends very much on their resources, their previous experiences, their mental flexibility etc. For that matter, I don't use the term "soundhealing" because I don't want to encourage an attitude of passivity or of lack of responsibility on the participants' side, or even some type of magical thinking.

**Mirror:** Is there anything else you feel to be important?

**Alex:** Yes, I would like to encourage everyone to sing, to use the resonance of the voice in the body and also to be aware of any mental reactions to one's own voice. I think we can discover a lot about ourselves, about our energy, in this very simple way.

**Mirror:** Do you have any projects for the future?

**Alex:** I am just finishing a throat-singing video course in English. It is about 4-5 hours of recorded video, half of which I filmed while I was traveling in Nepal. The other half was filmed in the beautiful gardens of Dzamling Gar. And there are some "noisy" bits I didn't manage to film in the Gar, but I will capture them most probably in some beautiful forest. I will offer it to all the Vajra sisters and brothers as a way to share my experience and knowledge with sound, however limited. It doesn't mean everyone should learn Siberian throat-singing and practice it. I see it more like a menu from which one can choose whatever one finds useful.

There are a few videos where I share my perspectives on emotional expression, effort vs relaxation in the context of the voice, and the various opportunities that working with sound can open for us. There are also many exercises which are very strong ways to unblock the energy in the physical body and awaken the vitality, while simultaneously opening up the voice, bringing more depth, resonance, and confidence in the way we project our energy. That's it. Thank you very much for the invitation to this interview! May it be of some benefit!

**Mirror:** Thank you, Alex!



# Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje, Master of Mahamudra

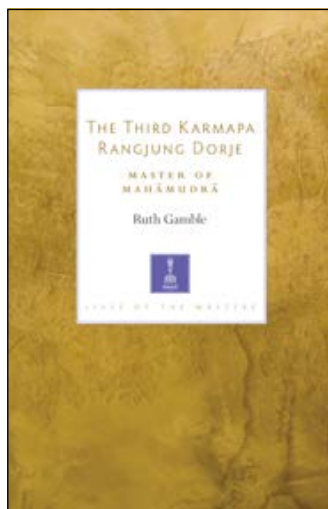
Ruth Gamble  
Shambhala, 2020  
Lives of the Masters Series

Andy Lukianowicz

## Emptiness is Form

This book, which recounts the life (or lives?) and times of the “Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje, Master of Mahamudra” and forms part of the excellent Lives of the Masters series published by Shambhala, was presented by its author Dr Ruth Gamble (as was the biography, in the same series, of “Karmapa II Karma Pakshi” by its author Charles Manson) in a series of talks produced by Shang Shung Institute UK. Always interested in the remarkable Karma Pakshi, Dr Gamble’s engaging talk persuaded me to read Rangjung Dorje’s biography as I had done Karma Pakshi’s, and it recounts an equally remarkable life. The book on Karma Pakshi, “[The Second Karmapa Karma Pakshi](#)”, and Dr Gamble’s other book on Rangjung Dorje, “Reincarnation in Tibetan Buddhism”, have been reviewed already in the Mirror.

In it, Dr Gamble has written what in some ways is a ‘total’ account of the Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje’s life, times and teachings, with a seamless overview of the spiritual, social, political, sociological and psychological situation in that historical period of Tibet, beset with feuds between Kagyus and Sakyas (mainly in terms of temporal power, but also doctrinally on relying on more esoteric or exoteric teachings, respectively) and between warring Khans, in which his life was situated, alongside his own reactions to and reflections on it, with her own reflections on its relevance to conditions in her (our) own time. She also considers his enormous influence and spiritual charisma and the religious legacy he bequeathed on Tibetan Buddhism in the centuries that followed, due to his ‘invention’ of the reincarnation system, dealt with in greater detail in her previous book on Rangjung Dorje, “Reincarnation in Tibetan Buddhism”.



Divided in two parts, the first part of the book draws on biographical works by and about Rangjung Dorje, in traditional manner treating his birth, education, retreats, teaching activities (he may have taught Dolpopa, major Jonangpa propagator of the Shentong teachings on emptiness counter to the quasi-nihilistically oriented Rangtong teachings of the Gelugpas; although Rangjung Dorje’s focus of interest seems rather to have been the primacy of the guru-disciple relationship) and death and re-birth (and retroactive initiator of the Karmapa reincarnation lineage).

No ‘prisoner of Shangri-La’, to use Donald Lopez’s useful term, Dr Gamble discusses Rangjung Dorje’s birth in abject poverty (the plight on today’s refugees immediately springs to mind) after two previous Karmapa incarnations born into rich and powerful families; she recounts his ‘difficult’ relationship with Karma Pakshi’s family heirs, owners of the Karmapa monasteries/fortresses and estates, which they did not even allow him to enter. However I cannot help but think that his social extraction and provenance may have helped him not to succumb to the ‘multiplying cliffs of depravity’ of the Mongol courts (a euphemism for military encampments?) where he spent too many years and ended his life, a prisoner to the Khan’s obsession with esoteric teachings and magical powers. (Although Dr Gamble also usefully adds a converse, more upbeat interpretation, in terms of his translife as reincarna-

tion connecting past and future Karmapa hierarchs, as a ‘great escape’).

In terms of his teachings, on all aspects and genres of the Buddhist teachings, these are presented in translations in the second part of Dr Gamble’s book, treating his Liberation Story, his dreams of the Indian mahasiddha Saraha, his dreams and visions as sources of some of his teachings (like our own master Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche), his commentaries on the tantric systems of Chakrasamvara and Kalachakra, his recommendation to practitioners to undertake solitary mountain retreat, his warnings against the traps of samsara, his recounting of Jataka birth stories, his teachings on the confluence of Madhyamika, Mahamudra and Maha Ati, the three teachings that most influenced his life; Dr Gamble also speculates that this may qualify him as a precursor of the nineteenth century Rime movement), on practices pertaining to mind and wind, and many others, many in song form. Also in a footnote she refers us for any omissions in her own book to Brunnholzi’s publications on Rangjung Dorje’s numerous writings, and Elizabeth Callahan’s translation of his important doctrinal book *The Profound Inner Principles*; Dr Gamble’s lively translation of his Mahamudra Aspiration Prayer adds some fresh insights to the many other existing translations; she omits these as tradition dictates they be studied after receiving the related empowerments and transmissions.

Rangjung Dorje’s was an era of war, earthquakes, imperialist invasions and incursions, plague and (sometimes man-induced) famine – much like our own, all of which makes his reflections, both aspirational and socially critical, on religion, temporal power, doctrine, relations to non human powerful entities and powers, not to mention relations with other people including the less socially advantaged, witness his choice of a Jataka tale featuring Buddha taking birth as a low caste woman dancer, and the great and deep need to engage in true and sincere spiritual practice with clarity, generosity and humility, all the more apposite in our time. Thank you, Dr Gamble, for rendering this book so relevant, or rather necessary, to our own catastrophic time. ©



# Red Tara, The Female Buddha of Power and Magnetism

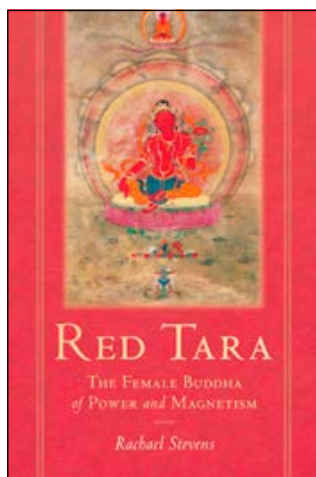
By Rachael Stevens  
Snow Lion 2022  
264 pages  
ISBN – 9781611809695

Alex Studholme

Red Tara is the more esoteric, sexualized counterpart of the more maidenly or motherly forms of the female Buddha, the ubiquitous Green and White Taras. Red is the colour of desire and Red Tara is invoked in order to apprehend an object of desire. Her function is not to save or protect one from fear, but to subjugate and magnetize, her two main iconographic attributes being an iron hook, to summon, and a noose, to bind. She can be called upon for all kinds of things: to control the forces in the way of building a monastery, or to amass the resources needed for a long meditation retreat, for example. But her practice is also used by yogins and yoginis to attract a consort, the noose visualized as lassoing the neck and the iron hook as grabbing the heart or genitals of a potential partner.

This book has its origins in the moment its author Rachael Stevens, entering the precincts of the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya, bought a small book on Red Tara by Chagdud Khandro, the Texan wife of the esteemed Nyingma master Chagdud Tulku. Her interest was piqued, leading both to a doctorate from Oxford University and to her own personal practice within the Chagdud *sangha* and other Tibetan Buddhist groups. The result is a work that, while firmly academic in style, also conveys a strong sense of Red Tara as a real, live presence in contemporary Buddhism. After a long general introduction to Tara – rehashing some fairly familiar material – Stevens presents us with a wide-ranging appraisal of Red Tara that fills a significant gap in western understanding of the Tara cult as a whole.

The practice of Red Tara is found within all four schools of Tibetan Buddhism and is rooted mainly in texts brought from India during the 11th century. Stevens concentrates her study on the way these In-



dian texts have been received by the Sakya school and on a modern *terma* cycle of a Nyingma lama called Apong Terton (1895–1945), which is the basis of Red Tara practice in the Chagdud *sangha*. Intriguingly, Apong Terton is said to have been reincarnated as the 41st Sakya Trizin, who was, as it were, reacquainted with the Red Tara *terma* in exile in India by one of Apong's disciples, who had travelled from Tibet to meet him. On his way, this same disciple also bestowed the initiation of the *terma* on Chagdud Tulku at Tso Pema.

The tone of both the ancient Indian texts and the modern *terma* is occasionally overtly magical. One of the Sakya practices, for instance, involves “ink made from the naturally-occurring blood of a twelve-year-old girl”. Chagdud Tulku, meanwhile, developed his own Red Tara practice to include a method of healing with crystals. Both collections include instructions on fire *puja*. And the Nyingma cycle also includes recipes for *chudlen* pills, as well as a Red Tara long-life practice. A Red Tara mandala and a special prayer invoking the goddess was offered to the Dalai Lama by the monks of Mindroling in 2005, when His Holiness was believed to be facing severe obstacles.

Stevens includes a chapter on Red Tara as Pitheshvari, a wrathful red goddess whose various body parts correspond to the twenty-four main *pitha* sites in India, where yogins and yoginis gathered for *ganacakra*. Stevens also demonstrates the different ways in which the assembly of Twenty-One Taras is interpreted to include forms of Red Tara, as seen in commentaries by the great Indian missionary Atisha, by the Kashmiri layman Suryagupta (who was cured of leprosy by Tara) and in the Longchen Nyingthig of Jigme Lingpa.

The pre-eminent subjugating goddess of the Buddhist pantheon is Kurukulla,

another wrathful red figure, immediately identifiable by her bow and arrow of red lotus flowers. (The same weapons are held by the Vedic love goddess Kamadeva and by the Roman and Greek love gods Cupid and Eros.) Kurukulla also carries a noose and iron hook, and, as Stevens explains, is closely entwined with Red Tara: either seen as an emanation or form of Red Tara, even as “the heart of Tara”, or alternately as manifesting Red Tara as a more peaceful form of herself. To complicate matters further, in the Sakya tradition the two deities are in fact not directly linked at all.

Like Red Tara, the Tibetan practice of Kurukulla is also rooted in Indian texts transmitted during the 11th century. She is even more overtly a goddess of love magic, using her arrows of desire to bewitch a sought-after man or woman. The other potential outcomes of her practice are once again numerous, including the ability to see spirits, coerce government officials and pass exams. More commonly, though, she is invoked to accrue wealth and, by lamas, to attract students. A prayer to Red Tara as Kurukulla in the Apong *terma* reads: “How without relying on subjugation can one gain the qualities to take on disciples? May I subjugate all those to be tamed, both good and evil, by manifesting in them the four devotions.”

But as Stevens makes clear, the practice of both these deities is ultimately regarded as a means to the final Buddhist goal of enlightenment. She quotes, firstly, the Tibetan lamas Palden Sherab and Tsewang Dongyal: “Red Tara... is special for activating our realization and overpowering our ego-clinging and neurotic states. With her help we are freed from the confinement of our egos so we are able to reach out to all living beings with *bodhicitta*.” Then the western scholar Miranda Shaw, who writes: “As Kurukulla rose in the pantheon, her sphere of influence expanded from the compulsion of love objects to the conquest of conceptual thought, Buddhist teachings and primordial awareness itself.”

Stevens' book contains a wealth of detail and reveals the considerable variety and nuance of these practices. In the Sakya school, we learn, a certain Kurukulla initiation depends on first receiving the empowerment of Hevajra. In contrast, the FPMT community of Lama Zopa has published a twelve-page booklet on Kurukulla, apparently allowing anyone to perform her rituals without any initiation whatsoever. ☺

# Pictures from the Past

## The Tibet of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu – Part 8

Raimondo Bultrini continues recounting his travels and experiences with Chögyal Namkhai Norbu in Tibet in 1988. They are at Nyaglagar in eastern Dege, residence of Rinpoche's root teacher, Changchub Dorje.

### The Mamo Cave

The days in the village of Namkhai Norbu's master go by quickly. Many people come to visit, but we also often go out for a walk. On a beautiful sunny day, we walk to a nunnery that was destroyed years ago. On the way to the last houses, a large crowd forms and dozens of people follow us in procession.

There are also nuns – some of them are very old – compelled to live all together in tiny houses instead of having the isolation and concentration they need to put into practice the teachings received from Changchub Dorje.

Along the way, the procession of our companions circles around a *chorten*, shrouded in smoke from the *sang*, singing and dancing, then crosses a wooden bridge miraculously suspended over the river that goes down to the valley.

Arriving at the top, between rocky canyon-like gorges, Namkhai Norbu points out a place of power to me, a small cave sacred to the Mamo, one of the most powerful classes of Yidam protectors. "You could create some good causes for other beings here," Rinpoche tells me.

As the procession continues towards the monastery, I enter the hollow where there is only room for one person to sit. I feel quite proud, as if I have received a very important assignment, my first "spiritual" assignment in Tibet. "Creating a good cause", in Buddhist jargon, means to do a spiritual practice with the intention of offering other sentient beings the opportunity to encounter the teachings so that they



A thangka of Changchub Dorje.

can free themselves from the cycle of re-birth and thus from suffering. But can my practice really help someone else, even beings I don't know?

I'm not sure why, but I feel that it might. I believe I have been "initiated" onto a path that leads in one direction, to realize my true condition and nature. "Initiate" actually means to begin and since I started on this path, I have had the feeling of being watched and listened to by a thousand eyes and a thousand ears. Particularly here, in these caves in which even the mountains seem to see and hear.

My meditation is an offering to these entities through the sacred sounds of mantras and mudras that have been transmitted for centuries to communicate in a kind of multidimensional universal language, capable of being understood even by pure spirits. But then, as usual, come the thoughts that disturb and unsettle me.

Pride: does being here and being held in regard as a disciple of Rinpoche, surrounded by affection and attention, correspond to a precise design, to predestination? It is this land that gives a higher meaning to every event in life. In my eyes each privilege becomes the expression of an acquired merit.

Ignorance: if this is indeed the case, why do you feel confused and powerless inside this cave? What are you doing here? I re-

cite the mantras automatically, my mind following my thoughts. I am not focused with all my senses on the essence of what I am doing and everything loses value.

I have to get out of the cave and my thoughts come with me, but now there is the distraction of the landscape opening up before my eyes. The river cuts through the valley between two wide mountain gorges sloping towards the horizon, and the village ends with some small crops on terraces. The rocks, as red as a sunset, seem to have been sculpted to feed the popular imagination, which here, just like in Galen, sees in them the likeness of horses.

I walk with the master and grandsons of Changchub Dorje near the large white chortens of the village. Some approach for a blessing, others merely smile, lowering their heads with their hands clasped in front of their faces. Still others show their tongues according to the ancient custom that has survived – apparently – from the era of transition between Buddhism and Bon. In fact, it happened – they say – that during the harsh phases of religious persecution, the followers of Bon were recognised by their blackened mouths due to their continuous recitation of prayers and mantras. Bon means 'to recite', and the most observant believers did nothing else from morning till night. Thus, in order to prove one's non-involvement in the practices of the ancient shamanic religion, a person would show his tongue to officials and dignitaries.

### Symbols of the Lama

Even before his death, Changchub Dorje was considered something of a saint. But after he left his body, at the precise moment he died together with his second wife, the master of Nyaglagar was, as we would say in the West, beatified. For that reason the paintings portray him in the symbolic robes of all the deities of the Buddhist pantheon, with the ritual objects, the halos, in the positions of Tantric practices, where each gesture has a precise meaning for initiates into the secrets of the practice.

A group of *thangka* still needs to be coloured, but many are already complete, with colorful and luminous tones. In general, these paintings do not depict just one figure. They are always of mandalas, im-





Images from the temple at Changchub Dorje's village.

ages representing a context that is particular and universal at the same time. The painting always represents the individual at the center of the relative condition of existence. The deity, the realized being, the Yidam or protector is encircled by meaningful figures, belonging to the same class, family, or representing different manifestations of beings, peaceful or terrifying, joyful or angry, seated or dancing, still or in movement. The perspective is always frontal, and the minor figures are arranged in a crown around the main one, enhancing its importance.

Changchub Dorje is depicted in every possible way, surrounded by his sons, who are also practitioners themselves and the lama's main disciples, his masters, his famous contemporaries, and, of course, the deities. In all, I counted at least a hundred *thangka* dedicated to the master, and no less numerous the carefully preserved ritual objects and important relics.

Along with 'malas' of all sizes, medicine containers, stones, clothing, and anything else with which he had contact, even spectacles, the *dorje* and *phurpa*, the ritual objects with which he is most frequently depicted in esoteric drawings, are preserved to illustrate his main achievements.

The *dorje* represents the masculine principle, the symbolic sceptre of the power of a kingdom that will never decline, the

indestructible force of primordial energy that – like lightning – traverses space and time. Its upper and lower parts are identical, generally with five rays and points: one side symbolizes the samsaric vision of suffering, the other the nirvanic vision of happiness. It also signifies spirit and matter, absolute and relative truth, but the supreme value referred to the *dorje* is that of the immutability of the perfect original condition, regardless of circumstances that change over time.

At the centre of the ten rays corresponding on one side to the five passions and on the other side to their corresponding wisdoms is a sphere of five colors called *thigle* in Tibetan. From here the visions start and here they manifest: it is the primordial energy that moves everything, eternally.

This is surely the most important ritual object in Tibetan Tantric esotericism. It has the same meaning as the ancient Bön symbol of the svastika, present in many other religious cultures and debased by the shameful exploitation of it by the Nazi regime.

The *phurpa* is a wedge-shaped knife with four sides. It goes to the roots of man's attachment and reaches the centre of the target moving from all cardinal directions. Thus, with the *dorje* in his right hand and the *phurpa* in his left, Changchub Dorje represents the realization of a teach-



The damaru that belonged to Changchub Dorje.

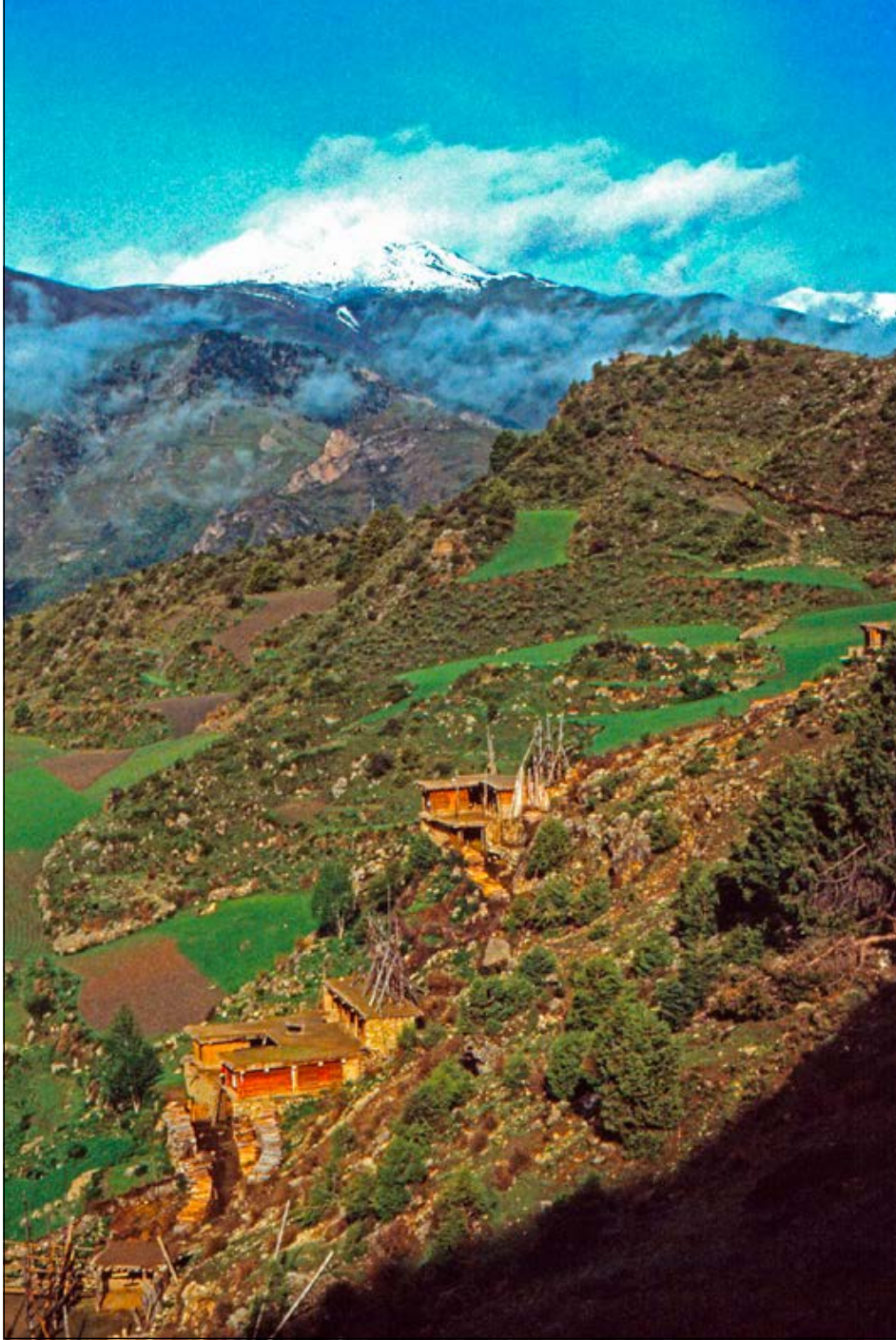
ing that came down to him unchanged through the millennia.

Among the objects preserved is also a *damaru*, the small two-sided ritual drum with strings at the ends of which are the little balls that strike the skin of the drum: the player rotates his wrist to give the rhythm. The sound and size of the *damaru* vary according to the type of practice. The *damaru* most commonly used by Changchub Dorje is specific to Chöd, one of the most secret and interesting practices in Tibetan Buddhism, popularized by a master who lived in relatively recent times, Machig Labdrön.

There are many types of Chöd practice, but the principle is the same for all, that is to 'cut off', as the Tibetan word itself says,

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Courtesy of MACO

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to cut off all attachment at the root, starting with attachment to oneself, to one's own person.

With this intention, the Chöd practitioner offers up his or her physical body, mind, sensations, energy, everything he or she possesses as food for spirits and divinities. To invite them to this macabre banquet he uses the *damaru* and a small trumpet made from animal bones. Then he uses visualizations and mantras to communicate his intention to these beings and to 'authenticate', or make sacred, his sacrifice. Just as Buddha offered his body as food to tigers to alleviate their hunger, so

the *chödpa* offers himself or herself entirely for the benefit of all beings.

It is a practice that requires a great deal of concentration and develops its full potential in special places, such as Tibetan cemeteries, where corpses are left out in the open for vultures to feed on.

Everything happens naturally in the vision of the *chödpa* as he or she – quietly seated – invites spirits and deities with the sounds of the ritual instruments. In his imagination, a dance of monstrous ravenous figures begins around his body, and, as if that were not enough, the practice should ideally take place in a cemetery so as to create the strongest possible sensa-

tions. In this way one works with the tantric principle that attributes the creation of a particular energy to each movement – whether physical, psychic or emotional. This energy is the fuel for reaching even higher levels of experience.

Conquering the fear of death by evoking it with the loud fracas of drums and bells in the middle of a cemetery is certainly an original system, but one that is difficult to apply in the West.

### The Yab Yum Union

There are many teachings that I learn about directly or indirectly, especially here in Nyaglagar, because it is like being at the source of the knowledge transmitted by Namkhai Norbu to the West through his seminars, books, and spiritual retreats. The master himself seems to find the old enthusiasm of the disciple in reading the texts that the heirs of Changchub Dorje offer him, pulling them out here and there, from their homes and from the library of the temple.

Among them is a small booklet with a red cover, the last one written before his death. It is called "Self-Liberation Through Sensations", and is entirely devoted to sexual practices related to the control of psychophysical energy. Namkhai Norbu says it is very interesting, and I am naturally intrigued, but I have to content myself with knowing that one day, perhaps, it will be translated. The title recalls the type of teaching to which the text refers. The principle of self-liberation is Dzogchen, the natural state of the individual. Not being a method per se, it makes use of all methods.

The one indicated in the red booklet by Changchub Dorje, before leaving this world, refers to sex, therefore among the most pleasant to practice (although obviously sex is here seen only as a tool for spiritual realization). These are most likely techniques for integrating the strong energy set in motion by the sexual act into the state of contemplation.

It is a characteristic of many Eastern religions and philosophies to use these methods to reach higher levels of knowledge. Many may have heard of the Tao of sex, for example, and think that one must withhold semen by inhibiting orgasm. After leafing through a book on the subject, some might try – very irresponsibly – to put into practice what they have read, thus risking creating serious problems for themselves.

Rinpoche explains that, "Only after years and years of practice, with a close partner and under the guidance of an experienced master, can one master and concentrate the flow of sensations in the right way".

Integration into the natural state occurs through subtle channels of energy that the practitioner must learn to recognize, and be instructed and guided. The goal is not physical fulfilment but the realization of the so-called union of clarity and emptiness. This is the recognition of the natural state of each individual.

The sexual act between man and woman is also presented as the union (*yab yum*) of the male principle, method, with the female principle, energy. Method alone cannot lead to any realization, and neither can energy.

Many peaceful and even terrifying *yab yum* figures fresco the walls of the Nyaglagar temple, indicating the divine nature of these practices of which men have lost knowledge.

All the images of masters and Yidams of the Tibetan figurative tradition offer a visionary interpretation that transcends the artistic level alone, with their rigid repetition of forms and gestures. The temple is almost always empty, and we often go there with Namkhai Norbu looking for the right light to photograph the large paintings that fill every corner of the walls, all created during Changchub Dorje's lifetime based on his experiences and visions.

One day we finally find the right time to shoot, when the sun beats down from the opening at the top, illuminating the richly colored walls. Most striking of all is the painting of Ekajati. Her body is black and sinuous, with outstretched arms and one shining eye in the center of her forehead. Almost as large as a man, the figure is enveloped in flames and the whole image has a surprising vitality.

Looking at this image, everything else seems to come into motion, like a slow, exciting dance of monsters projected on the walls by an invisible camera. From the ceiling, the light of the sun is dimmed by clouds coming and going, like the psychedelic spotlights of a nightclub, but without music, without noise.

Much more disturbing are the frescoes in the small temple dedicated to the ferocious deities, where the gold-painted figures stand out against the black background and seem to come out of a nightmare. I enter for the first time with a group of children who point to the entrance, a tiny door where you have to duck down to go through, and they invite me to sit on the cushion in front of the lectern and the small altar, as if they were the hosts.

I look around a little, and soon one of the old monks who was a disciple of Changchub Dorje enters. It is the time for the ritual of the guardian deities depicted so intensely on these walls and the monk invites me to stay.

He asks me if I want to accompany him using the drum, while he performs the ritual by ringing the bell, another symbol of energy in the primordial state. The drum is very large and is beaten with a femur, creating a low, deep sound, certainly the one we hear every night.

Very soon I have to interrupt my attempts to guess the rhythm, because – without understanding the language and the moments in which the invocation becomes more intense – I end up dramatising or emphasising the wrong moment and beat the drum quite faintly when the text calls for the entrance and intervention of the invoked spirits.

Many religious practices resemble shamanic rituals because they are undoubtedly its offspring. The search for a relationship with the spirit world stems from a strong and profoundly human need to understand beyond appearances. For Tibetans, dialogue with those entities that we do not see materially but that are in contact with us in a thousand visible and invisible forms, must have its own language, its own access codes in nature itself.

If a dog wants to communicate with us, it uses particular forms of expression. So we use words, gestures, drawings and – above all – the mind, both to transmit and to receive messages. Mantras, invocations, and rituals are the result of the ancient experience of many humans who, before us, felt the same need to communicate and who were unjustly or superficially judged for many years to be sorcerers, or shamans, in a derogatory sense, both by westerners and by Buddhists themselves.

In times long past – this is true, with great ignorance and scant regard for life in many parts of the world including Tibet – animal and human sacrifices were performed (and even today, fortunately rarely, in some corners of the world some are still performed). But then it was thought that in order to gain heaven's favor the same results could be achieved by symbolically using images and statues, as taught by Shenrab Miwoche, reformer of Tibetan Bön.

Continuing on the path of knowledge, mankind may gradually discover that no chanting, no prayer, but a real state of contemplation is needed to achieve peace with beings of all dimensions. ©

To be continued in the next issue of The Mirror



# How I Met Chögyal Namkhai Norbu

John Groeneveld

Dear Vajra family,  
Some readers might remember me as a monk living in Pomaia from 1998–2014, a time when I regularly attended teachings at Merigar. This aspect of my life perhaps made me more visible in the community and I hope a small slice of my life story might help you pass a few minutes. I will try to stay present while I am writing it!

In 1993 – before “t’internet” as they say in Lancashire, the county in England where I mostly grew up – I set off from there to India to search for a guru. I didn’t know there were some lamas in England at the time. I only believed that there was a path, reincarnation was a fact, and I wanted to find someone who could tell me how to “destroy my ego” and get enlightened. I had £1500 in travellers’ cheques in my money belt, a certificate in teaching English as a foreign language, and a rucksack full of India kit.

I ended up in Dharamsala, and followed some teachings and met some Gelukpa lamas. When my money ran out, I asked one of them for a *mo* [divination], and he said Taiwan was good both for work and for my practice. I went and lived there for a few years, and earned my living as an English teacher. I also took refuge, met Lama Zopa Rinpoche in person for the first time, and received practice advice from him. I used my savings from work to travel twice to India and Nepal, follow teachings and do some personal and group retreats. I naturally also met some dharma friends. One of them gave me a book by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, called “Dzogchen, the Self Perfected State.” He thought that I would like this style of teachings, which he considered freer than the Gelukpa style. The book had a light green cover. On the back I remember a photo of Rinpoche from the waist up, wearing a yellow silk chuba and a matching hat, I think it was in the Mongolian style. I remember being very impressed by his face, especially his cheeks, and thinking something like “What an amazing-looking person. I’d like to meet him.” I still have the book, but now that I look at it again, I see that the photo is inside, full length, black-and-white and no hat! Is this the “Mandala effect”, or some trick of memory? In any



case, perhaps I planted a seed back then for a future meeting.

I read the book, but couldn’t understand much, except that it was important to get a direct introduction to the nature of the mind. I made a mental note to do that sometime, and then maybe I would be able to understand what he was talking about.

13 years later, in 2006, I had been a monk (Getsul [novice], for those who know the term) for about four years, and was doing my best to follow the advice of Lama Zopa Rinpoche, my first teacher. I was living at Nalanda, a small monastery in the idyllic countryside of Tarn, in the south of France. I began to become aware of the possibility of something known as “spiritual bypassing”, whereby you take the decision to follow a path, change your name and recite all kinds of mantras, for example, and then you think that you have made a spiritual great leap forward. But in fact, you might not have made any progress in healing your childhood wounds, for example, because it might need some culturally specific methods. To quote an older monk I knew, “The dharma won’t work if you haven’t solved your Mummy and Daddy shit!” I was lucky enough to meet a skillful psychoanalyst who I believe was also a realized practitioner, and she helped me a great deal with my mental disturbances, and also to distinguish between healing the person and going beyond the person. It was at her urging that I first attended one of Rinpoche’s retreats in Barcelona in 2006.



Shortly after arriving at the retreat, I was blown away by the sound of a couple of thousand people singing along with the Song of the Vajra. It seemed that the coloured cloth hangings behind Rinpoche were visibly vibrating, like ripples on water. I saw people dancing on mandalas that reminded me of mats from Twister, a game for kids. It didn’t seem like any dharma scene I had already seen. Walking along the beach later, I found myself sitting staring at the pebbles on the ground for a long time, feeling quite happy and without feeling the need to do anything else.

My next encounter was in 2008, after transferring to the monastery in Pomaia, in Tuscany. A group of people was going to a teaching and I took the chance to go again. The subject was the sound of the five elements. What sticks in my mind was the drive up to Mount Amiata, and seeing a bird of prey wheeling above the car in the sky. The bird had what I am sure was a snake hanging from its beak. I realized later that that’s what Garudas do.

Evidently, I kept coming. By the time I had finished the FPMT Masters’ Programme in Pomaia, I was also sure that I wanted to return to lay life. I understood that to be a monk is a very special and virtuous condition, but also that personally it was important to me to be able to have a successful, harmonious relationship with a woman. My relationship with my mother was terrible, and this was an unresolved issue that I had simply avoided by becoming a monk. I noticed that my attention was always drawn more to the women around me in the gönpa than to the teachers on their thrones. I learnt a lot from Lama Zopa Rinpoche and still have friends from his sangha, but from Chögyal Namkhai Norbu I understood that one can develop in the path without having to renounce ordinary



# Reflections

## An Essay on Tawa – Gompa – Chöpa

Up Close and Personal

Jacqueline Gens

Some years ago, I dreamt of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu nudging me to teach the *Tawa-Gompa-Chöpa* (view, meditation, conduct) triad in Merigar. The dream suggested a seat not on any throne or elegant place but a comfortable winged chair from my home in public housing for seniors. Naturally, this seemed strange, even amusing as I am not a teacher in our community but a somewhat Bohemian poet, politically progressive and an ardent feminist. Fortunately, Dzogchen can sustain anyone despite their personal identities. Thus, I sincerely hope that Santi Maha Sangha teachers and all practitioners of Dzogchen spend some time contemplating this three-fold process – a cornerstone of his teaching as it is beyond any belief system, doctrine, or nationality!

In an early booklet (187E) about SMS Teachers' Trainings created from transcripts of oral teachings given at Tashigar Norte from 2002–2005, Rinpoche spoke the following: "Remember that we have *tawa*, *gompa*, and *chöpa*. *Tawa*, the view is related more to intellectual studies, what we learn. *Gompa* means being in the knowledge and dealing with it in one's existence. *Chöpa* means attitude; if one is too limited, doing something wrong and creating problems between students, then your *chöpa* is not good."

When I began to go more deeply into the topic examining how the view introduces

life and relationships. I have discovered that that is also not easy, but I feel that I am no longer in a role which shows an aspect that is incongruous with my inner desires. I now feel that I am in the right boat for this part of my journey. The crew is a bit more wild, perhaps more like pirates than the navy, but that makes for an interesting ride.



Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche giving a SMS 2nd level retreat at Lower Khandroling, Tseggyalgar East, USA. Jacqueline is standing last on the right.

our presence and awareness, supports our practice and integration in everyday life through conduct, much to my delight, a greater understanding of the view arose. Many of us dream of our Master, so I did not think it any special sign other than honoring with gratitude his living presence among us beyond time and space where he is still teaching us. This inquiry also brought me closer to the essence of his great compassion and patience with us. While I am not a scholar nor the best of practitioners, I have spent most of my adult life dedicated to the Teachings from various Teachers and lineages, as well as practicing SMS since 1994.

Over the years, I have often heard from other practitioners that SMS is only intellectual. This is entirely untrue as each level presents hundreds and hundreds of hours of practices coordinated with the view to

experience a taste of the result to enhance our knowledge. For long time students, we all know that this SMS training was very important to Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. Why is this so? Many times, he spoke of the base for continuing Dzogchen in the future, uncorrupted and pure. An easy way to manage the vast subject matter is through this integrative process of *Dawa, Gompa, and Chöpa*.

Although Dzogchen is not a linear path, it does have aspects of structure to assist one's development. For me, *Tawa, Gompa, and Chöpa* became the rough hewn signposts far and few between that slowly furthered my evolution as an individual committed to staying the course during easy and difficult times. While there are many different translations of this phrase, Rinpoche has taught it over and over beginning with his earliest retreats.

I first became aware of this phrase often translated as View, Meditation and Conduct in SMS and later during SMS teacher exams where the emphasis in many of the examinations seemed to be within the framework of this approach. While practitioners of Dzogchen can follow their own path based on interest and capacity as there are many choices, for me, the choice was always SMS.

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I hope that my brief account doesn't bore you, but I have left out the sex, violence and drugs to avoid shaking anyone out of their contemplation. ©

John Groeneveld  
(formerly known as Losang).

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That prompted me to further investigate this explanation over the years from sutra, thru tantra and even the limited knowledge I have of Yantra and other movement practices. For me, it resonated as a resourceful method for retaining knowledge which often fades in old age, whereas concrete experiences tend to be recollected with greater ease even when words leave us. It also assisted me in navigating the ineffable and ungraspable tenants of Dzogchen. The triad of *Tawa*, *Gonpa*, and *Chöpa* presented by Rinpoche was my simple road map into the vast wilderness of the unknown rather than mere intellectual inquiry while living an active worldly life. And for this, I maintain infinite gratitude to him and my Vajra community.

At some point, I was amazed how this process synchronized to the three statements of Garab Dorje and Dzogchen Upadeshas introduced to us by our Master over many years, as well as the classic Trikaya of Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya. I found this interdependence very useful in understanding how a precise view thru concrete introduction leads to experiences of various practices to stabilize the view, especially guru yoga, and finally in continuity of our primordial state whether in stillness or movement. A marvelous skillful means for someone limited like me. And this is not false modesty but based on observing my many limitations. For we all know very well those special words “observe yourself” and “integrate with circumstances.”

These are not my assumptions. Those who have read Rinpoche's book, *Teaching in a Perfect Way*, can relate how important this process was to him. Later, I began to see that all SMS levels followed this tripartite process. The above quote is repeated again almost exactly (Shang Shung Publications, 2021, pp 98–99) in *Teaching in a Perfect Way*. There are many such similar quotes throughout this amazing text.

We are living in an era of dark times. “Civilizations Come and Go” the Greek philosopher Herodotus wrote. We are no exceptions given that all phenomena are impermanent. We can easily observe this personally and historically.

At the conclusion of one SMS level, Rinpoche asked participants to plant the seeds of Dzogchen. We are his seedlings, so let us sprout to tend our garden for the benefit of all to enjoy in the future. I appeal to old and young practitioners in age and experience. Death is inevitable – it's never too late to dive in deep. The rewards are immeasurable even in the present!

Any mistakes here derive from my ignorance and the lack of clarity of an old lady. Nonetheless, I've tried to fulfill the Master's directive within my capacity from the personal twilight of dreamtime. Best Wishes to all---

*Jacqueline Gens, in old age devotes her time to practice, studying and composing poems increasingly in solitude following the instruction – “I always advise people to study the Dzogchen tantras and lungs, and compare them with what I teach. This is the real way to learn.”* Quote by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu from *An Oral Explanation on the Vision of Clear Light* by Patrul Rinpoche, (pp. 54–55, 2007 Shang Shung Edizioni)

Tsegyalgar East

June 4, 2023 Saga Dawa

In the year of the Water Rabbit







## Mudra of Samaya

### Renewing The Bond Of Deep Sacred Trust

Photo reportage:  
Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's 1987  
Visit to Samye Monastery, Tibet

John Shane

Text and photos (except pg. 36) © John Shane

In 1987 and 1988, and also later in 1991, I traveled around the world with Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, and wherever we went I carried with me – in a heavy-duty suitcase – a Sony 8mm camera, boxes of video cassettes, a small external video monitor, microphones, and a VCR, as well as other equipment that I used for recording and on-the-spot editing.

But, while I did occasionally shoot video of Norbu Rinpoche when he was giving teachings, the responsibility for recording the teachings was mainly taken by others, and I mainly used my camera to record what we did when Rinpoche wasn't teaching.

The video tapes I shot in those years have been digitised and during the last few months here at my studio in London I've been viewing the files of the footage I shot as we traveled from country to country, and as I watched the videos I made screenshots and wrote notes to help me recall what's in each digital file.

Looking at the screenshots after I'd made them, one thing I couldn't help but notice was how playful Rinpoche always was, whatever we were doing and wherever we were in the world.

No matter what country we were in, no matter who we met, Rinpoche would always find some game to play, some trick to show us, some song to sing, some joke to tell, some improbable adventure on which to lead us.

Norbu Rinpoche was, of course, a profoundly serious person in every way, but, as I viewed the videos from our travels over and over again while taking screenshots from them, the thought came to me that Rinpoche's seriousness and the playfulness that I was noticing when I watched the videos were actually *inseparable*, and that his extraordinary playfulness was actually the *outer* aspect of his profound *inner* seriousness.

Watching him laughing and joking in so many of the videos as he engaged with so many different people in so many different circumstances, I began to feel that it was the profundity of his inner seriousness that enabled him to carry out every outer activity so playfully.

It occurred to me then that what gave Rinpoche the inner freedom that enabled him to be able to play so freely in the world was his complete realisation of the emptiness of all phenomena, his unshakeable understanding that everything arising in his field of experience was *the play* of the energy of his own primordial state.

In other words, his profound inner seriousness manifested outwardly in his living his life with an utterly confident spontaneous playfulness.

Of course, this is just a subjective impression that I formed from observing Rinpoche closely in his life and then, more recently, watching the videos I shot while traveling with him.

Others who were close to Rinpoche and knew him well may have formed other impressions.

I can only speak for myself, and I do so accepting that I may be wrong.

But it seems to me that it was because Rinpoche recognised everything arising in the field of his experience as the play of the energy of the primordial state – his natural condition – that he was able to simultaneously carry out so many activities in the world with such precision and to carry such great responsibility so lightly.

Norbu Rinpoche's life was a life of commitment to others.

His whole life was a *mudra* of commitment. By '*mudra*' I mean here, rather than just a shape made with the hands in a ritual, a complete gesture made with one's whole being.

Rinpoche's life was a *mudra* made in fulfilment of his vow to live for the benefit to all beings, a fundamental aspect of his *Samaya*.

But, while one might see a spiritual commitment or a sacred vow in terms of



When I began to travel around the world with Norbu Rinpoche, I always carried my trusty Sony video camera with me.

it being a binding obligation and thus as something very heavy, it seems to me that a major part of the *total gesture* of Rinpoche's commitment – his *Mudra of Samaya* – was lived out in the *playfulness* with which he fulfilled his many obligations.

As I see it, this playfulness in action was what enabled him to do so much with such grace. He was able to offer personal advice to so many people, to give so many profound teachings for so many years, to found and manage so many centres in so many different countries with different laws and customs, and at the same time also to write so many books, because he could do it all *playfully*.

But, while the profound seriousness of Rinpoche's commitment to the Dzogchen teachings and to bringing those teachings to others is – rightly – always commented on in written accounts of his life, it seems to me that the extraordinary playfulness that accompanied his seriousness can tend to be overlooked when people write about Rinpoche, and that's why I'm making a point of focussing on it here.

In due course, I plan to edit, colour correct, and create audio commentary for the video footage that I shot in different parts of the world so that the videos can be enjoyed by others and perhaps others, seeing the video, will also be reminded of Rinpoche's *playfulness in action*.

But, in the meantime, the best I can do, as part of my own *Mudra of Samaya*, is to share with you some of the screenshots that I've recently made, as a way to renew

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the bond of deep sacred trust that we individually and collectively share with each other through our own and others' connection to Norbu Rinpoche.

But rather than including screenshots from video recorded in several different countries, I want to focus on footage that I shot in one place, and, in honour of Norbu Rinpoche's country of origin, the screenshots I've chosen to include here are taken from video I recorded during the four months that I spent traveling in Tibet in 1987 with Rinpoche and a small group of his other students.

At that time, after years of there being no possibility of traveling at all in Tibet, or there being only the possibility of traveling there with the constant supervision of a government official as a guide, the possibility of traveling freely in Tibet opened up for a short while, and, during our four months there, we were able to travel wherever we wanted without a tourist guide or an official supervising us.

For Rinpoche, despite the fact that there was an element of sadness for him in seeing his native country in the difficult situation in which he found it when he returned there, it was a carefree, joyful time – a time during which he renewed his contact with family members and friends who had remained living in Tibet, and a time in which he also renewed his connection with the culture of his native land, renewing in particular his connection with one of the most important sacred places associated with many of the spiritual traditions of which he was such a great exponent – Samye Monastery – the first Buddhist monastery that was founded and built in Tibet in the years 775 to 779 AD with the assistance of Padmasambhava himself – otherwise known, of course, as 'Guru Rinpoche' – the archetype of the 'Precious Master' who was the source of many lineages of teaching and practice.

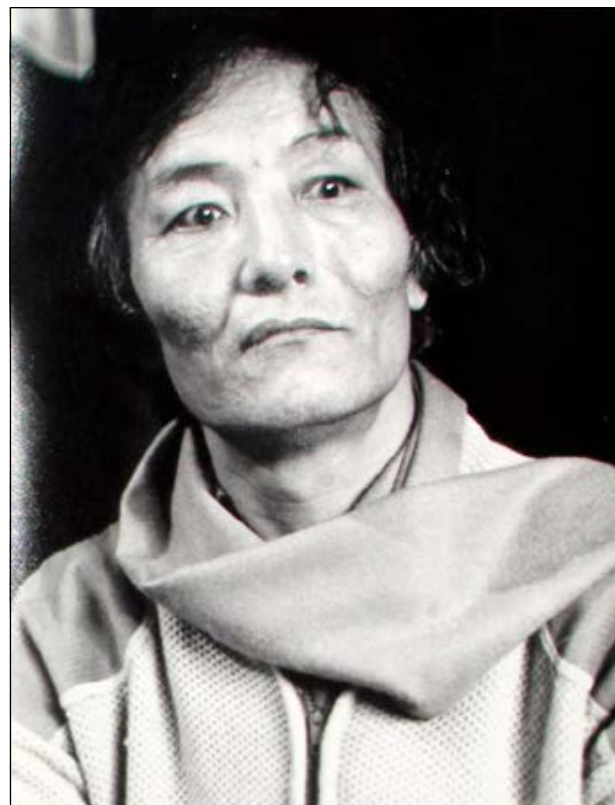
My hope – my *playful* hope – is that looking at the sequence of images included with this article will, however briefly, give you the feeling that you were there at Samye in 1987 along with Norbu Rinpoche and that – if you do experience that feeling – it will give you a renewed sense of your deep sacred connection to Norbu Rinpoche and to his other students, wherever they may be and wherever they may be around the world, and that, in this way, the *Mudra of Samaya* in your own life will be renewed.

John Shane



As a young man, Norbu Rinpoche had a hard choice to make. If he wanted to fulfil his commitment to serve all sentient beings, he knew he would have to leave his family and his native country.

He traveled alone to the other side of the world carrying nothing with him but the teachings in his heart and mind.



When he arrived in the West, at first he became a Professor at the Oriental Institute of the University of Naples. Later, after many requests, he began to give Dzogchen teachings.

When I met Norbu Rinpoche in London in 1978, he was still a young man, and he had learned Italian, rather than English, so he was teaching in that language. Since I knew Italian, already had a grounding in Buddhist teachings, and had followed other Tibetan Buddhist masters, not long after meeting Rinpoche, I began to translate for him at his talks and retreats in different parts of the world, and later began to work on producing books in English with him.





In 1987, while on a journey with Norbu Rinpoche that took us to many different countries, I traveled to Tibet along with Jo, who was then my wife, and our daughter Jessie – who was then 20 months old – and a very small group of Rinpoche's other students.

When we arrived in Lhasa, Rinpoche stayed at his sisters' small house on the edge of the town, while everyone else in our party stayed in hotels.

During our stay in Lhasa, among many other places, we visited the Lhukhang, the Dalai Lama's Secret Temple that is situated on an island in a lake behind the Potala Palace, which can be seen in the photo above.

In order to be able to travel to sacred sites outside Lhasa, we hired a small bus with a local Tibetan driver. Donatella Rossi, an Italian student of Rinpoche's, who spoke fluent Chinese as well as having a good knowledge of Tibetan, acted as our translator with our driver and any officials with whom we needed to interact.

When Norbu Rinpoche decided to visit Samye monastery, the first Buddhist temple to be built in his native country, we set out early in the morning in our bus, driving South East along rough roads for two and half hours to get there.



When we came to the Yarlong Tsangpo river, also known as the Brahmaputra, the river at the highest altitude in the world, we had to wait for the ferry to arrive, but, with the telephoto lens of my camera, I could see the ferryman in the distance, silhouetted against the sky as he approached us where we waited on the South bank of the river.



When the ferry pulled in to the shore, we began to load our bags on board.



Most great lamas would travel accompanied by a retinue of monks...but Norbu Rinpoche never became a monk. After arriving in the West, he married and started a family, and many of his students, like myself, also had families.

So, when I traveled with Rinpoche, it was accepted as completely normal that my family would accompany us, and that's how my daughter Jessie came to travel to Tibet when she was still only twenty months old. Jessie never had any health problems at all on the journey round the world with Rinpoche. In fact, in Tibet, she was the only one of our party who didn't suffer from altitude sickness when we first arrived, while even Rinpoche, who was born in Tibet, did at first have problems breathing at that high altitude, particularly at night.

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For part of the river crossing, I sat next to Norbu Rinpoche – as always joking, and ever playful!!! – on board the ferry. Rinpoche's elder sister, Asô, who lived in Lhasa, can be seen at the bottom right hand corner of the photo above.

All through our trip, Rinpoche wore, as he often did, even in hot Summer weather, a thick down jacket. On this trip, his jacket was bright red in colour.



Phuntsog Wangmo, Norbu's sister's daughter, who is now the head of the Shang Shung Institute School of Tibetan Medicine, was at that time completing her studies in Tibetan medicine in Lhasa, and she was one of the small group traveling around the Lhasa valley with Rinpoche..

As we crossed the Yarlong Tsangpo a strong wind arose and we all had to bundle up against the cold.



Phuntsog resting on the ferry.



Among the small group Norbu Rinpoche's close students accompanying him on the visit to Tibet, was Adriano Clemente, one of the principal translators from Tibetan of Norbu Rinpoche's written works, who – fine musician that he is – also now serves as the *Omze* or principal chant leader of the Dzogchen Community.



As we approached the North shore of the river, we could see the old battered truck that was waiting for us – our 'taxi' that would take us to Samye.

It was hard to get the ferry close enough to the shore for us to be able to disembark, but finally the ferry was close enough for Norbu Rinpoche, in his red down jacket, to be helped ashore, followed by his sister.

Once we were all ashore, our baggage was loaded onto the truck, and and we all climbed aboard.

As we set off down the bumpy track towards Samye, Norbu Rinpoche and his sister rode inside in the closed cab of the truck, while the rest of us rode behind them, holding on for dear life up on the truck's open flat bed with the cold wind blowing in our hair.



When we arrived at Samye, Norbu Rinpoche's sister descended from the cab, carrying his white straw hat.





Then Norbu Rinpoche himself, in his red down jacket, climbed out of the cab after her.



After the wild ride from the ferry in the truck, our small group of travelers assembled in the courtyard of Samye monastery and, looking around the monastery courtyard, I could see some of the activities of the everyday life of the local people in progress.



As I looked at the damage that had been done to Samye monastery and filmed the ramps that had been put in place to enable repairs to be carried out to the once golden roof that had been completely destroyed, I remembered the words that Norbu Rinpoche had often said when I was translating for him:

'In Tibet they built great temples and the temples had roofs of gold, but when the time came that we lost our country, did the temples with roofs of gold save the teachings...?

No. It was those who carried the teachings in their hearts and minds that saved the teaching.'

And, looking at Norbu Rinpoche in the courtyard of Samye monastery the ancient golden roof of which had been completely destroyed, I couldn't help but think that he was himself someone who 'had the teaching in his heart and mind', so that when he had to leave his country he had carried the teachings with him wherever he went.

And, now that he had returned to Tibet, he was carrying those teachings back to their source.



Due to government restrictions, there were no grand lamas resident at Samye when we visited the monastery, but a welcoming group of young monks had gathered near the entrance doors as we approached.



At the main entrance of the temple, Norbu Rinpoche stood for a moment in silence looking up at where the destroyed roof of the temple would once have been.

I climbed up onto the roof of a secondary building to record the video from which this screenshot is taken, and from there I could see Rinpoche, in his white hat and red jacket, gazing up at the missing area of roof beyond the builders' scaffolding.



Norbu Rinpoche led us to look at a column on which an inscription told the story of the founding of Samye and explained the meaning of the inscription.



Then Rinpoche walked in through the main doors to a hallway where a senior monk was waiting to greet him.



The monk led Norbu Rinpoche around the inner courtyard of the temple towards the centre of the Samye mandala.

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Many artworks that had been painted as murals on the walls had been badly damaged, but where enough of the murals remained for us to be able to view them, Norbu Rinpoche explained their meaning to us.



The senior monk brought Norbu Rinpoche a stick wrapped in a white scarf as a sign of its sacredness.



*'This is the stick of Vimilamitra,'* Norbu Rinpoche explained, before telling us about the life of the 8th Century Dzogchen master, a disciple of Sri Singha and one of the eight teachers of Padmasambhava, who was invited to Tibet by King Trison Detsen and then stayed in Tibet for 13 years. It is said that he translated sutras and tantras by day, while teaching at night giving Dzogchen teachings to the King and other students. Vimilamitra later left Tibet and went to Wu Tai Shan, where it is said he manifested the highest realisation of Dzogchen, *The Great Transference*.

Constance Wilkinson, a distinguished translator of Tibetan texts, listens to Rinpoche's explanation together with Jo and Jessie Shane.



We were led up a flight of stairs to an upper level from where we could see out across the whole valley in which Samye monastery complex is located.



Norbu Rinpoche took advantage of being high up to take some photos of the layout of the monastery which was designed, based on the Buddhist temple Odantapuri at Bihar in India, as a mandala of structures

representing the ancient Buddhist conception of the universe, with the main temple, the Utse, representing Mount Meru at the centre of the mandala.





We were then led back down to the ground floor again, and, as we walked with Norbu Rinpoche through the shadowy corridors leading to the central part of the temple, butter lamps burned amid the ritual tormas on an altar, and the corridors reverberated with the loud, insistent sound of a drum as a monk performed a ritual.



In a dimly lit corner, a different kind of welcoming committee waited for us.

As the drum's beat echoed off the temple's walls, a mysterious Guardian statue stood shrouded in white scarves.



Norbu Rinpoche paid homage to the Guardian...



We walked on, past more butter lamps and prayer wheels...



...until finally we entered the central hall of the temple, where we could see, across the room, a statue...



...of Guru Rinpoche himself, the archetype of the *Precious Master* and one of the founders of Samye, who, through the power of his tantric practice, overcame negative forces that were preventing the completion of the building of the monastery, an activity that is re-enacted in the ritual performance of sacred dances.



Our *Precious Master*, Norbu Rinpoche sat for a few minutes on a bench among stacks of Tibetan sacred texts in their wooden boxes...

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...as he gazed at the figure of Guru Rinpoche...

...then Norbu Rinpoche stood up and placed his head on the feet of the statue, bowing in homage to Guru Rinpoche...



The statue's eyes, open wide, as in the practice of Dzogchen contemplation, met our gaze as we watched Norbu Rinpoche.



The Vajra, or Dorje, in Guru Rinpoche's hand, symbol of the power and energy of the liberated mind, manifesting beyond place and time, points us away from Samye...points us away from Tibet...

...to another place, another time...to the founding of another temple, this one in Tuscany, Italy, in the late 20th Century.

As someone who carried the teachings in himself and embodied the essence of the teachings, manifesting Guru Rinpoche in his own life, Norbu Rinpoche brought the teachings with him from Tibet when he came to the West.

And on Monte Amiata, deep in rural Tuscany, in Italy, while I filmed him with my video camera, he placed relics he had brought from Tibet in the foundations of the first temple of the Dzogchen Community, a temple that he himself designed and for which he raised the funds, mirroring, the founding of Samye in Tibet so many centuries before, and maintaining the Mudra of Samaya that he manifested in his whole life. ©





Inspired by the example of Norbu Rinpoche's life of service to others, I wrote this poem of aspiration in which I make a commitment to continue to carry out – to the best of my ability – my vocation as a poet and practitioner in the face of the many difficulties that we are all encountering in the world today.

## Mudra of Samaya

(Lone Voice Crying  
In The Wilderness)

John Shane

Deep and ancient wounds  
of colonisation and slavery  
scar our nation's history  
and I cannot hope  
to heal them all  
Yet I swear I will make  
my contribution  
no matter that it might  
be small

*I will raise my hands to work for  
the common good  
– I will raise my voice  
to sing*

*And though mine may be  
a lone voice*

*Crying in the  
Wilderness*

*Still I will offer up my song  
– for whatever blessings  
it might bring*

There is so much wealth  
in this land

But it is held  
in too few  
people's hands

To the poverty of the many  
there seems to  
be no end

And I have seen  
the hunger  
in their children's eyes  
turn brother against brother  
and friend against friend  
But I swear  
that we can find  
another way  
to solve the problems  
we all face today

And I believe in my heart  
that I, myself, can change  
so that, together  
we can start  
to end the conflicts  
that are tearing us apart

*I will raise my hands to work  
for the common good  
– I will raise my voice  
to sing*

*And though mine may be  
a lone voice*

*Crying in the  
Wilderness*

*Still I will offer up my song  
– for whatever blessings  
it might bring*

Some say that for those  
like you and me  
there can be no  
salvation

They say that we have brought  
our misery down upon ourselves  
And that we are the cause  
of our own downfall and  
damnation

But what I say is that those words  
are the lies  
Of those who would not have us  
even dare to try  
to change our nation's present  
situation

Their words are like  
poison in our ears  
that serve no purpose  
but to add to our fears  
and I will not listen to them

*I will raise my hands to work  
for the common good  
– I will raise my voice  
to sing*

*And though mine may be  
a lone voice*

*Crying in the  
Wilderness*

*Still I will offer up my song  
– for whatever blessings  
it might bring*

So many here stare  
poverty in the face  
and must do their best  
with little more than  
the bread of their  
affliction

Too many streets in our towns  
are filled with those who  
have lost their homes  
as they struggle in this world  
– their lives ground down by  
unrelenting poverty  
that has led them to seek  
false refuge in the oblivion  
of addiction

I know there is no easy way  
to get from where we are today  
to where we need to be

But still I pledge my heart and soul  
to the journey towards our destiny

And even though I know our final  
goal  
may be something I myself may not  
be blessed  
to live long enough to see

*I will raise my hands to work  
for the common good  
– I will raise my voice  
to sing*

*And though mine may be  
a lone voice*

*Crying in the  
Wilderness*

*Still I will offer up my song  
– for whatever blessings  
it might bring*



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