



THE MIRROR

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The Anuyoga System and Dzogchen Guruyoga
The Three Wisdoms
Insight into Khaity Joyful Dances
Interview with Dr. Phuntsog Wangmo



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Front and back covers: Khaita dancers performing in front of the Museum of Asian Art and Culture (MACO) in Arcidosso, Italy during its inauguration on December 10, 2016.



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Dzogchen Teachings with Yeshi Namkhai

June 20-27 2024

Merigar

Arcidosso GR

www.merigar.it



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Dzogchen Teachings with Yeshi Namkhai

Dear all,
We are happy to invite you to the Dzogchen Teachings retreat, which Yeshi Namkhai will hold in the Gönpa of Merigar from the 20th to the 27th of June 2024.

The retreat will begin on Thursday the 20th at 4.00 pm; from the 21st to the 27th the teaching sessions will begin at 10.00 am. Those who cannot be in Merigar in person will have the opportunity to follow the retreat via an open webcast.

<https://www.merigar.it/en/courses-and-events/>

We have prepared two different forms, one for those who register to participate in person, the other for those who will follow the retreat via webcast. Please fill in the one appropriate to your circumstance.

The number of participants in attendance is conditioned by the capacity of the spaces and safety regulations; to allow us to better organize the welcome and provide the best possible service, we therefore ask you to register as soon as possible.

Yeshi Namkhai will give teachings in English, and there will be a translation into Italian. Translations in other languages will be organized both for those present and for the ones on line. When completing the registration form it is possible to select the language you need.

For the 7 days following each retreat session, the respective recordings will be available on the [replay](#) page of the webcast website.

Find the link below to access the list of facilities in the Merigar area where you can stay. Some of them, for the period of the retreat, will offer discounts to the participants of the retreat itself.

<https://www.merigar.it/en/visit/alloggi/places-to-stay-near-merigar/>

Anyone following the retreat, in person or via webcast, can make a free donation based on their possibilities. The offers will help cover the expenses incurred by Merigar for the organization and necessary structures.

<https://donate.merigar.it/b/cN2cO17tra8K1GgcMN>

Thank you for your precious participation and collaboration, do not hesitate to contact us for any questions or clarification you need.

We hope to see you soon in Merigar and online.

The Gakyil of Merigar





Rinpoche teaching in Hong Kong in 2012.

Courtesy of Jing from China

The Anuyoga System and Dzogchen Guruyoga

An excerpt from the first day of the Song of the Vajra Retreat, Hong Kong, May 16, 2012

Continued from issue 162 of The Mirror

Anuyoga is a Vajrayana teaching originally transmitted by Guru Padmasambhava. He also transmitted superior *Anuttara* Tantras such as the *Guhyasamaja* Tantra and others. Later on at the time of the Kagyupa teacher Marpa and the Sakyapa translators, those Tantras still existed in India and were retranslated. For instance, we have two kinds of translations of the *Guhyasamaja* Tantra: one is the ancient translation and other is the modern translation. The meaning has not changed but the way of translating and using words is a little different. Modern translations are presented in a more intellectual way while the ancient translations concentrate very much on the essence, this is the only difference.

Guru Padmasambhava also taught another method of Vajrayana transformation called Anuyoga. This tradition has only continued in the Nyingmapa school, not in other traditions, because when Marpa and the Sakyapa translators went to India, this teaching did not exist there. At the time of Guru Padmasambhava, he said that he received this teaching from some teachers from India. However, the origin of this teaching was a country called Trusha. Guru Padmasambhava advised his students to go there in the future to translate all the original Anuyoga texts. It doesn't mean that Guru Padmasambhava taught an Anuyoga tantra but he transmitted



knowledge of Anuyoga. Later, his students, and particularly Nub Sangye Yeshe, a very famous translator, went to Trusha. In any case all the Anuyoga original Tantras were translated into Tibetan from the language of Trusha, not from Sanskrit, or from Indian languages or from the language of Oddiyana.

For this reason Trusha is very important as the origin of the Anuyoga teaching. However, Trusha was not Oddiyana, not the famous Shambhala or even Shang Shung. Trusha was located in Russia, in present day Kyrgyzstan. We can understand that from these teachings and from their histories. However, later on, all those places in central Asia, including Trusha, Oddiyana and Shambhala were invaded by the Muslims and disappeared.

Some of my Russian students live near the area that was Trusha and they have heard people say that there are still many statues of Bodhisattvas that can be found there, just like in Afghanistan. This is just a little history to give you an idea, but what is important is the Anuyoga teaching method.

When we do Dzogchen practice, if we use some methods of transformation we always apply the Anuyoga system rather than the official Anuttara Tantra system because the latter is a little difficult for Dzogchen practitioners. When we do Anuttara Tantra practice we have to read the *sadhana* and start by thinking that everything is emptiness. Then we read how to develop the seed syllable of the elements from emptiness, and how to develop our dimension of the pure mandala.

When we finish constructing the whole mandala with its seed syllables we have to consider how we manifest as the main deity. What does it look like, what color, which kind of ornaments, how many arms, how many legs, and so on? This is called the development stage; we read and develop the visualization mentally. When we have succeeded with that visualization then we have to visualize the chakras, channels and so on internally and try to integrate with them. So the method of practicing is gradual, and we develop it until we are in the state of the non-dual two stages, working with our minds. We may spend years and years applying our minds, not going directly beyond mind. In Vajrayana this is, in general, the higher Tantra system.

Anuyoga uses the transformation method, however, it explains how our real nature is. There is no difference between Anuyoga and Dzogchen. Anuyoga explains how our real nature is the three primordial wisdoms: essence, nature and energy. What is essence? It is emptiness, *kadag*. What is nature? Clarity. What is energy? Without interruption. When we explain about energy we talk about three primordial potentialities: sound and light and rays. Since the beginning all sentient beings have these perfected potentialities. But even though we have these potentialities from the beginning, we are ignorant of having that knowledge and because of this ignorance, there is no benefit. We are always in samsara.

Anuyoga explains this in the same way as Dzogchen. How can we get in that state because in order to realize it we need to be in that state. We cannot realize it simply by being in our mental concepts. Those are not our real nature, just like reflections are not the real nature of the potentiality of the mirror. And so we use the method of transformation.

Transformation has the idea of impure and pure vision. In Anuyoga we also have impure vision or the relative condition, but for transforming it according to Anuyoga we do not need to go step by step in a gradual way because there is no reason to construct anything. Since the beginning we have that self-perfected quality. What is important is that we receive the transmission. When we use transformation we consider our dimension to be like the pure dimension of a mandala. When we receive the introduction from the teacher, he or she shows us a mandala and then we imagine it. In the same way when we transform into the deity, the teacher shows us what the deity looks like, we receive that transmission and have that idea, and instantly we are in that state. This is the Anuyoga system. For instance, a mirror has infinite potentialities so when reflections appear in the mirror, they do not need to develop slowly, from the feet gradually up to the head. The reflections appear immediately. In the same way everybody has that potentiality from the beginning and this is the reason we transform instantly in Anuyoga.

Of course it is very important to receive that transmission. Even if we have learned transformation in a gradual way, Anuttara Tantra style, when we are thinking about how many arms there are, we are not thinking about how many legs. When we are thinking about which kind of ornaments, we are not thinking about how many heads the manifestation has. In the end we need to have a global idea, like a picture. For example, when we recall a very famous painting, we have an idea about it but we don't recall all the details concretely.

When we study logic in college, this kind of concept is called *tonchi*. *Ton* refers to everything we see and that our senses have contact with. *Chi* means a global idea that we have in our mind. When we say "horse", immediately we have an idea of a horse but we don't need to have all the details about a horse in our head. We do visualization that way with Anuyoga.

After we have received transmission, we use, for instance, *HUM*, the seed syllable of the Vajra family, sounding and visualizing the *HUM* to transform instantly, so when we chant the mantra and do the visualization it works. But we are not doing it in a gradual way. This is called the Anuyoga system and it is essential that we know this because in the Dzogchen teaching, all practices use the Anuyoga system.

So this is more or less a little idea of what you should learn from the Dzogchen teaching. However, the indispensable essence of the teaching is called Guruyoga. Guruyoga is a general name in all Vajrayana and each tradition has its own Guruyoga. This is because we receive initiations from a teacher, not from Avalokitesvara, or Green Tara, or Kalachakra, and so on. The teacher is called the Guru and so Guruyoga means we are in the state of what our teacher has transmitted to us.

In order to apply that, different traditions use different ways. Some may use different kinds of complicated visualizations, or different kinds of invocations, or use many things involving mental concepts for a long time and then remain in the essence only for a short time before finishing that practice. However, practicing in this way Guruyoga does not become very important. In the Dzog-

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chen teaching we go directly to the essence so the way of doing Guruyoga in Dzogchen is different from others. We shouldn't go after names because while the name is always the same the substance is not.

How should we do Guruyoga in the Dzogchen teaching? We visualize a *thigle*, a five colored circle with the Tibetan letter A at the center. The letter A is the origin of all sounds; it represents sound. We have our primordial potentiality of sound and light and rays. Sound develops from secret sound, which becomes inner sound, which becomes outer sound. We can understand outer sound because immediately we have the idea of hearing something with our ears. Outer sound is related to the material aspect. However, inner sound is something we cannot hear with our ears and may only discover through our energy or through vibrations. Secret sound is still more essential and when we discover our real nature in that moment we also discover secret sound.

The symbol of sound is the letter A, which is white and represents light. Then the A develops into five colors. For Guruyoga we use the form of a circle because when there is any kind of potentiality its dimension is represented by a circle.

Guru Padmasambhava explained about the *thigle chenpo*, or total *thigle*, which means everything is in a perfect state, like a *thigle*, with no corners. If there is any kind of corner then it is no longer a *thigle* but a triangle, a square, or another shape. That is an example of limitations. Being beyond any kind of limitation is symbolized by the circle.

We do this visualization at the center of our body because it is a symbol of our three primordial potentialities. It is not really our three primordial potentialities but appears in that way in order to give us an idea about them because we are living in our dualistic vision. For instance, we know that Samantabhadra appears as a human body sitting crosslegged, without ornaments, and we consider this figure to be the primordial Buddha. In the real sense, it symbolizes the Dharmakaya. The Dharmakaya is beyond form and color but this figure gives us an idea of the dimension of the Dharmakaya. We are human beings and live in the dimension of human beings and so Samantabhadra manifests with a human body. The color blue represents emptiness, just like the deep blue, empty sky. The figure is without ornaments because it is not a manifestation but simply represents the real condition of the Dharmakaya.

In the same way we also use this symbol of the *thigle*, and visualizing it we sound A. Why do we sound A? If we sound it while doing the visualization, the visualization becomes more alive. It is not essential that we always sound the A. We should work with circumstances and if there is no possibility to sound it, we don't.

We simply do the visualization. If we want to feel it a little more concretely we can also exhale deeply with the A.

We start by using our minds, first of all thinking that we want to do Guruyoga, then using mind to do the visualization. However, we cannot continue always thinking that there is a white A in the *thigle*. If we continue that way we are not in the state of Guruyoga. In order to be in the state of Guruyoga after we have done the visualization we relax. Relaxing doesn't mean that we cancel our visualization. In the development stage in the Vajrayana teaching, when we have realized the visualization, we don't need any effort or need to continue to think that we are the deity. We can just be in that presence. It's the same with Guruyoga. We are just in that presence and relax in that state. This is the state of Guruyoga. 🌸



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The Three Wisdoms

The following is an excerpt from Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's 'An Introduction to the Practice of Contemplation', published by Shang Shung Edizioni, edited by Costantino Albini and translated from Italian into English by Andrew Lukianowicz. It is taken from the Master's oral teachings given at Monte Faito in 1980.

Reproduced from The Mirror issue 105, July–August 2010

The three aspects of the condition of the individual: *ngowo*, essence; *rangshin*, nature; and *thugje*, energy, are called 'the three wisdoms of the base'.

You can understand them by observing the process of formation of thoughts.

While we are in a calm state of Shine a thought arises: if we observe it, the thought disappears. The thought in itself does not produce action.

Action is produced only if we 'pursue' the thought, letting ourselves get caught up in it; it is not produced if we simply observe it as it goes its way. This applies not only to thought but also to any phenomenon of the emotions or the senses, that is to all the manifestations of energy.

If we restrict ourselves to observing it the moment when it arises, the thought dissolves and disappears.

This is the principle of 'self-liberation'.

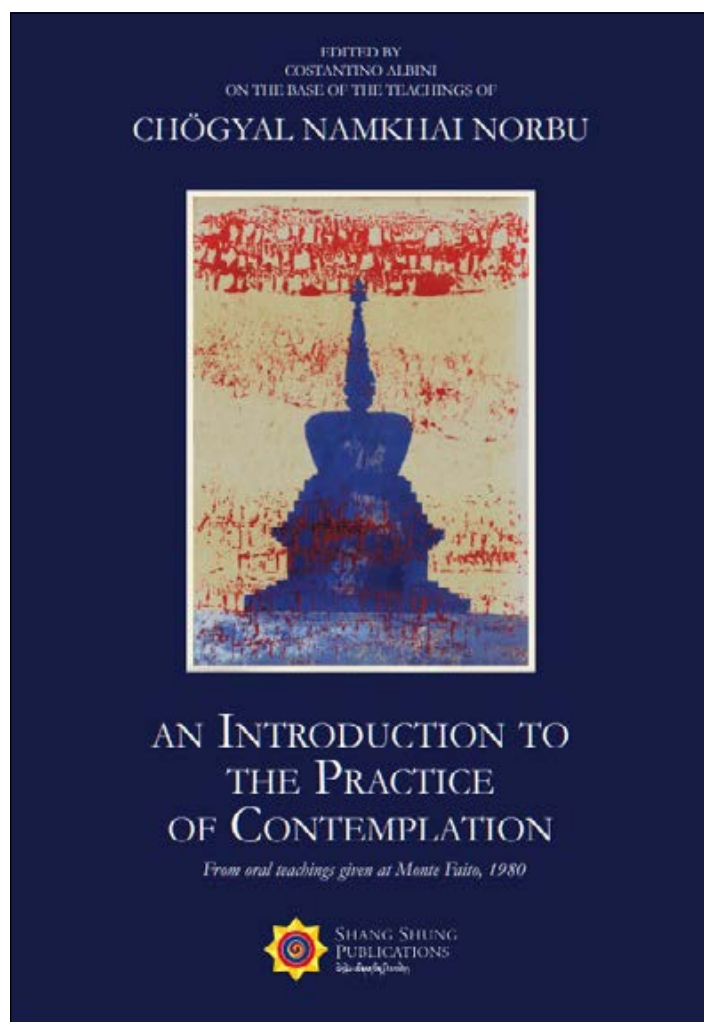
Essence

Thoughts cannot be blocked. Only someone who has never tried can think that it is possible. In the Dzogchen Semde tradition there are exercises for attempting to 'block thoughts'. You practise continuously for one, two or three days 'blocking thoughts' one at a time. As soon as they arise you think: "I don't want to think, I want to block".

After some days in retreat at last you come to understand that there is no way to block thoughts, it really is impossible.

After making this discovery you must practise the opposite. Think of everything you can without leaving any empty gaps, look right and left and think, think strenuously until you wear yourself out.

This, too, is really a very important practice. Both creating and blocking are actions, and through this last exercise you come to understand that there is no way to resolve this problem by entering into action.



The only solution is to be in the state of self-liberation, Leaving thoughts free, without pursuing them.

However you must not remain indifferent, because that is nothing but distraction; on the contrary, you must always be present. If you are not present, the state you are in is no longer contemplation.

When you have presence then every thought that arises liberates itself, like a wave arising in the sea and disappearing in the sea, or like a snake loosening its own knots.

At times a snake will wind itself in knots, making a tangle so complicated as to seem inextricable to an observer. But the snake has no need of our help, if we stand by and watch we will see that at just the right time it knows how to get loose with the greatest naturalness.

The same applies to thoughts; if we observe them without pursuing them and without intervening they liberate themselves.

A practitioner who observes thoughts well will discover that there is nothing to find. There is no place where thoughts originate, there is no place where they abide, and there is no place where they end up. All he finds is emptiness. This is the essence.

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The essence is our own primordial state itself whence all thoughts manifest, just as a mirror reflects all forms. The reflections arise from the mirror itself, but if we look for the reflections 'inside' the mirror we do not find anything, only emptiness. That is why it is said that

The essence is emptiness.

There are two ways of conceiving emptiness.
The emptiness of that which has never existed.

The emptiness of something that appears to perception to be present but which in reality does not exist. The concept can be understood by logic rather than through practice.

The example traditionally given is of animals' horns. We know that a cow has horns but a hare does not, nevertheless we are able to say 'a hare's horns' or 'a horse's horns'; we can say and imagine these because we know that a cow has horns. It is as if our thought places the cow's horns on the horse's head.

However if I say 'a horse's horns do not exist' or 'a cow's horns do not exist' these are two very different ways of not existing.

Why is saying that a horse's horns do not exist not meaningful? Because we have always thought that a horse's horns do not exist. But on the contrary for us a cow's horns actually exist, so if we say that a cow's horns do not exist it is very meaningful.

The meaning of the statement 'the essence is emptiness' is that, among all sense phenomena nothing that 'exists in or of itself' or that can be deemed 'actual in the absolute sense' (that is, independent of causes and conditions) can be found, because all things in our vision arise through interdependence and are produced by the dualist condition.

Even though we believe that everything that appears to our six senses is concrete there is nothing that can be deemed real.

Nature

Consequently, one of the most frequently stated principles of the teaching is that "everything is illusory"; nevertheless the illusoriness of phenomena does not mean that everything does not have its function that can actually be perceived by our senses. The function exists **naturally**, because as everything that we can perceive or conceive is always found in the relative condition then the function of everything too is found in the relative condition.

For example, we can state that (from the point of view of the absolute condition) food is an illusion, that it is not something concrete; but when we eat food it still fulfills its function of staving our hunger. Why? Because (in the absolute) hunger itself is illusion, the stomach itself is illusion. We eat illusory food, fill our illusory stomach and stave our illusory hunger.

Why then do we say illusion? Because everything that habitually we perceive and conceive is not the absolute condition.

If we get to the bottom of things, of all things, we do not find anything, so we say emptiness.

On the other hand, as in the relative condition everything has its function and its continuation, we cannot assert that a certain thing 'does not exist' or 'is not'.

The same applies to thoughts. Even though after we follow a thought to its source we find nothing, after an instant another thought arises. And if we observe this thought too and find nothing our logical conclusion is that 'it does not exist'. Evidently, however, this conclusion itself is nothing but another thought, and so on.

Thus we can see that, just as one thought naturally arises from the previous one in a continuous and uninterrupted succession, the same occurs in the case of objects that are present in our vision; all phenomena have their own function and their own way of continuing.

This is called 'the nature'; because even though the essence of every phenomenon of the senses is emptiness, its function continues and is always naturally present.

This function can produce both pure vision and impure vision.

Energy

As I have explained, our individual condition has three aspects: essence, that is emptiness; nature, that is the level of functions; and energy, that is the level of manifestation.

You can understand this even better when you practise Shine. *Everything that manifests is at the energy level.*

At times you may feel sensations of emptiness, at other times sensations of confusion or agitation that may manifest subjectively or objectively, that is 'inside' or 'outside' us.

For example, we may feel a great confusion in our heads, or as we saw above, while fixing on the object the object itself may seem to change. We know that if we gaze at an object intensely for a long time without relaxing, the object may appear to change colour or shape, and that at times this may seem a miracle.

For example, if I am gazing at the A and before my eyes the letter changes into the statue of a deity or into a spirit or it disappears, in reality this is not something marvelous. It merely means that I have not known to relax my attention at the right time. My fixation was too sharp and too long. As has already been said, *fixation on the object must be very sharp at the start, then gradually must be relaxed until the right level is found*; this is the way to reach the practice of true Shine without an object.

There is a parable in a Sutra. A man was listening to Buddha's teachings on meditation yet was unable to engage in the practice of Shine in the correct way.

Even though Buddha had explained it to him several times he continued to misunderstand, practicing in a way that was sometimes too rigid, sometimes too relaxed.

So Buddha asked him: "What do you do?" He answered: "I am a musician." Buddha asked: "What instrument do you play?" He replied: "The guitar." Buddha continued: "When you play the guitar in order for the strings to sound right should they be very taut or very loose?" To which the musician replied: "Neither; the right tautness lies in the middle."

Then Buddha told him: "See, your Shine should be the same."

Through this correlation the musician was able to understand and finally succeeded in his practice. ❀

The Garland of Views

A talk from the first day of The Garland of Views and Guruyoga of Padmasambhava SMS Explanation and Practice Retreat given at Dzamling Gar, Tenerife, 9–13 December 2023.

Adriano Clemente

Good day to everybody. I'm very happy to be here in Dzamling Gar and I want to thank the Gakyil for inviting me. When I come here, I always feel at home and I feel that this is a very special place for the continuation of the Dzogchen teaching. There are many Gars in the world, but this is, I think, a really special Gar because here there is the possibility for practitioners to stay for a longer time and do practice together so there is a great possibility for developing one's knowledge. This really should be a place where all practitioners should meet and exchange their knowledge and experiences in a very active way. Then really we have great hope for the future.

In general, in the Buddhist teachings we have Sutrayana and Vajrayana. Sutra is more related to the original teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni and is divided into Hinayana and Mahayana. Hinayana is teaching more related to those who have less capacity to integrate with the real sense of the practice and who need to follow precise rules. That is historically similar to Buddha Shakyamuni when he taught his students and they were like monks, controlling their body, voice and mind through following rules and taking vows. In the Sutrayana, there is also the Mahayana tradition. Also here, if we go historically they say that in the beginning Mahayana didn't exist. There was only the Buddha and what he taught, Hinayana. So this also we cannot know, it is difficult to say.

Mahayana tradition

In any case, the principle of Mahayana is not just controlling one's body, voice, mind through taking a vow or following rules, but more trying to cultivate a special kind of intention. If we are dealing more with our mind, with our intention, then the most important thing is not just following rules or taking vows but trying continuously to check our mind. Because if



we are following a teaching, it means we are aware of our condition, of what we call samsara. Samsara basically is at the root of the condition of suffering.

There can be many types of suffering: physical suffering, mental suffering, dissatisfaction, and so on. It means having awareness that there is no ultimate happiness. We are all human beings and we all have the same kind of mind tendencies and way of thinking. We are on the same level and we don't like to suffer. We like to be happy. But when we try to do something to be happy, what we do in order to attain happiness doesn't bring the result that we want. That is why the Buddha, when he gave his first teaching, the Four Noble Truths, explained about the cause of suffering.

What we consider to be happiness is just something we are trying to attain, to achieve, something that we like and that we feel attachment for. We want to have that object that we think will give us happiness. But even though we are happy or we have pleasure in that moment, it depends on this object. However, there is no single thing in all the universe that is lasting and permanent so if we base our search for happiness on something which is not stable or permanent, then how can it guarantee any happiness for us?

For that reason, the Buddha taught that the cause of this dissatisfaction or suffering is our desire or our attachment for something outside and the way to attain real, ultimate happiness is to go to the root. For infinite lifetimes – if we believe there were lifetimes in the past – our minds have always been acting in the same way, chasing after objects in search of this happiness, but never succeeding in attaining it. So now we start to turn our mind back and instead of always pointing outside, we start to turn our mind inside.

But what is this mind? What is this source of our mind? If we want peace or happiness, we should try to watch our minds and see all the confusion that we have. Then, just like the teacher when he's giving the introduction, telling us that our own mind is always the cause of problems, the cause of dualism, the cause of all suffering, if we stop chasing after objects, stop searching for happiness outside, then there is a way to discover the real natural qualities of our mind. These natural qualities of the mind are what in the Dzogchen teaching are called self-perfected qualities. It means that the real nature of our mind is just that same source of ultimate happiness or ultimate freedom that we are chasing in objects outside. So if we stop thinking and judging with our mind, stop trying to achieve something that creates actions and karma, and we do the reverse, then there is a possibility to stop this cause of samsara. This is the third Noble Truth.

Of course, in order to do that, we need somebody who guides us, who shows us what we should do to move in reverse from the object, to turn inside and discover these natural qualities. This is what we call the "path". If we are following a path, it means we are taking a commitment and that we want to do this kind of work for ourselves.

Vajrayana teachings

Then we have another series of teachings called Vajrayana. Guru Padmasambhava was an important master of the Vajrayana tradition. From the beginning Vajrayana introduces this real nature of our mind as the root of all phenomena. But while in the Sutra tradition we have this idea that samsara is the result of our actions and our karma, hence it is something negative

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which we should overcome because that is more going with our general capacity as human beings, Vajrayana introduces this principle called “Vajra” from the beginning. Vajra means all manifestations, what we consider to be impure vision, dualistic vision, everything from the beginning is already itself the manifestation of this primordial potentiality. It's just that we don't have the right vision and we perceive it in a distorted way. So, for instance, even if we are in this hall, in the real sense, it is a mandala of Buddhas and bodhisattvas and dakinis, and so on. But we do not see that. We see as human beings see, male and female, all our thoughts, our conceptions, our names, our stories; that is impure vision. But the Vajrayana teaching is not introduced in that way. It says that from the beginning we are this Mandala, we are already this deity, and all phenomena are already these manifestations of deities.

How do we transfer into this vision that the Vajrayana introduces? We have what is called the path of transformation. Transformation means we use a symbol of the real condition, such as mandalas, deities and so on. Then the teacher introduces us in that way to show us our real condition and we try to apply it and transform our impure situation into this symbol. This is, in general, the Vajrayana teaching.

Dzogchen teaching

Then we have the Dzogchen teaching or Atiyoga, which also presents a way of introduction, the only difference being that it doesn't need symbols or mandalas or deities because it goes directly to what we call the root or the supreme source, the primordial state and primordial potentiality. How is Dzogchen related to the other yanas?

In the Nyingmapa tradition, the first Buddhist tradition that was introduced into Tibet, there are nine vehicles or paths, starting from Sutra, Hinayana, Mahayana, then Vajrayana with the outer and inner tantras. However, these nine vehicles do not contradict each other because each one is like a base for the next one. This means that while a practitioner of Hinayana teaching follows that teaching, if you are a Mahayana practitioner you should, first of all, know well the meaning of Hinayana teaching and practice and integrate it with Mahayana. It is the same with the tantras. If you are a practitioner of the outer tantras you should already have a base of Hi-

nayana and Mahayana and in addition you also have knowledge of the outer tantras. This principle especially applies for practitioners of the inner tantras of Vajrayana, Mahayoga, Anuyoga, which are the path of transformation.

When we reach Dzogchen it means that everything is included, from Hinayana up to the last vehicle. It's all included in Atiyoga because – sometimes they give this example – the view of Dzogchen Atiyoga is like a being on the top of a mountain from where you can see all the lower hills and villages very clearly. But if you are at the base of the mountain, in a small village or half way up, you cannot see the top of the mountain. It is important to understand that this is not to show that the Dzogchen teaching is superior to others and we have a sectarian view. If we are a Dzogchen master, or Dzogchen practitioner, then we know that Dzogchen is everything – all of the Buddhadharma is Dzogchen teaching in its ultimate meaning. All teachings like Hinayana, Mayayana, the outer and inner tantras, are just like steps leading to knowledge of Dzogchen. So we must understand well how we should be as Dzogchen practitioners.

Some people have a lot of fantasy and think that in Dzogchen teaching, everything is very free, that we are already enlightened from the beginning and we don't need to do anything. Or if we need to do something, we should not follow any rules because that is a contradiction to the Dzogchen teaching. This is a completely wrong attitude. When we say Dzogchen, we use the word, “self-liberation”. The real meaning of this term is that once we discover the nature of our mind, its real condition is something that we cannot interfere with, modify or change. And by itself there is this natural quality. Natural quality means that in our dualistic condition, mostly everything is a result of our thoughts, of our mind, our thinking, so everything that we have now is like frozen ice. But the real nature of this ice is water. The nature of water is flowing so the nature of our mind is flowing, our thoughts are flowing and that is a manifestation of wisdom; it is not wrong, it is not negative. When we are at that level of practice, all our thoughts, all movements of our mind are called self-originated wisdom. This is the real meaning of self-liberation.

But then it happens that sometimes we understand this self-liberation in a

wrong way and we think it means that we must liberate ourselves, our emotions, our thoughts, so we can do whatever we want without restraining ourselves. That is the cause of many problems.

Santi Maha Sangha

This retreat is also related to Santi Maha Sangha because this text that Padmasambhava wrote [*The Garland of Views*] is like the inner structure or inner basis for the Santi Maha Sangha base book. So, just to give a short introduction for new people who don't know what Santi Maha Sangha is: “Santi Maha” means Dzogchen in the language of Oddiyana; “Sangha” is community. So the meaning of Santi Maha Sangha just means the Dzogchen Community.

How did this Santi Maha Sangha training start? First of all, there was a root text of Santi Maha Sangha, which was like a poem with many verses. As far as I remember, I think that Rinpoche wrote this text spontaneously, without thinking.

For those who do not know, Rinpoche was also what is called a *tertön*, a discoverer of *terma* or textual treasures. A *terma* is a teaching, given in ancient times by teachers such as Padmasambhava, that was not appropriate for that time. The teacher who gave the teaching thought that it would be useful for future generations and would hide it somewhere, such as in rocks, in the river, in the sea led to be discovered in the future. This is a material kind of *terma*.

Otherwise a teacher such as Padmasambhava, who had many students who were good practitioners, would hide this kind of teaching in the consciousness of a practitioner. Then after some lives this practitioner would be born as Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, for example. Then, sometimes, they may have a sign, like a dream from dakinis, to say that on a particular day, they should go to a particular place to receive that teaching. Other times, there is no such kind of indication, just without any intention something would appear in Rinpoche's mind and he would write it down. This happened a few times, not just once.

Somebody may ask how we can know that this is really something original, authentic; perhaps he invented it. One proof is that sometimes we have the same *terma*, or a very similar *terma*, discovered by different *tertöns*, even centuries apart.

For instance, if we look at the Mandarava *terma*, Rinpoche wrote the whole text of the Mandarava practice for the first time and gave this copy to Fabio or Iacobella and

said, "Just keep it, don't give it back until I ask for it." Then the next day he wrote it again and it was completely the same, except perhaps one sentence. The same things happened in the Longsal teachings, if you read the stories many times. Rinpoche said, "It is as if I had memorized this text that appeared in my mind". He had not memorized it, it just appeared.

Once I asked him personally how he experienced a *gongter* led. Mind treasure! Then he said, "It is like you have something in your mind. When you want, you can access it, but it only lasts for a short time and after two or three days, disappears completely".

I think that Santi Maha Sanga may have been something similar when Rinpoche wrote down this text in 1984. I remember that Giacomella translated it and they published a booklet that presented nine levels, each level related to some teaching, but it was not very clear and the text was quite difficult. In any case, it remained like that for several years.

Then in '88, Rinpoche made this famous trip to Mount Kailash. I was not there, but during the trip a lot of things happened and the conditions were very hard for the people travelling with Rinpoche because the road was blocked and they had to make a very long detour with many difficult situations for food, for sleep, for traveling. In general, when we have even small difficulties traveling, we become stressed and start to react in a different way than normal. On that trip there were maybe 60 or 70 people fighting for everything, as the situation was really hard. At one point, somebody actually fought physically for a place to sit on the bus with one vajra brother giving a strong punch to another practitioner. But this was not the only thing as people's emotions were manifesting freely and nakedly.

Rinpoche was quite disappointed with the whole situation. You can read all his feelings and impressions in his poem called *The Voice of the Bee*. The "voice" because the bee is always buzzing and complaining and Rinpoche was complaining so he used this title. In any case, I think that he also might have felt responsible for the situation because how could these students he had been giving Dzogchen teaching to for more than ten years behave in this way among themselves? And also with respect to the teacher.

Another story that Rinpoche told is that a lot of people were insisting that he

should give *thögal* teaching. He told them that he could not give this teaching just because the road was blocked and they were stuck in some place. Some people were not satisfied and didn't pay respect to what Rinpoche said. They used a recording or someone was reading a book of *thögal* instructions with a loudspeaker on the bus. So of course, when Rinpoche heard all this, he wrote *The Voice of the Bee*.

After that, he was in China for a year, then he came back to America. One day I was speaking with him and he told me that he thought that there was something missing, like a base, in our community. Then I think he made a connection to the Santi Maha Sanga that he had received some years earlier and he prepared and wrote this Santi Maha Sangha base book called *The Precious Vase*, a kind of basis of all Buddha's teachings. It starts from basic sutra teachings and then refuge and bodhicitta, and how to work with all these steps on the path.

Some people may ask how this can be Dzogchen teaching when they have been studying beyond good and bad for many years, and now they are studying the ten virtuous actions, the ten negative actions, what we should and shouldn't do. This really shows how a Dzogchen teacher should work with his students because, as we said, the Dzogchen teachings include everything, starting from these basic teachings. So Rinpoche started this base level of Santi Maha Sangha with a quotation from the great Dzogchen teacher, Longchenpa, showing how the attitude of a practitioner should be. All the first parts of the text are based on these teachings. Rinpoche was trying to help students become more aware of their condition because sometimes we like to jump on something that is easier for our mind to accept.

Three Trainings

In general, we don't like to observe our condition, our flaws, our limitations. We are always judging other people, seeing how limited they are, what they did wrong. Very rarely do we think about what we have done wrong, how we should overcome our limitations. We don't usually have that attitude which is why, basically, we need sutra teachings. For example, in these verses of Longchenpa, he says that there are three trainings as a basis for the path. First of all, there is moral discipline which means we are aware of a situation in samsara and we also understand how other beings are feel-

ing and try to act in a way that we do not harm or create problems for others. Working on that level is basic Hinayana.

In Mahayana, there is the same moral discipline but on top of that, we try to benefit or help others. We know this from the beginning because we follow the Buddha's teaching, even if we are Dzogchen practitioners. But if we behave in the opposite way it means there is something wrong, that we did not understand, because if we are fighting with a vajra brother in a bus or in a temple, wherever it is, it means that we are not controlling our emotions. This shows that we have not done this second training, meditation. If our practice or our spiritual path just remains at the level of intellectual knowledge, it cannot help so we need to apply this second training, *dhyana*, or meditation.

How do we do this training of the mind? First of all, we discover the ordinary condition of our mind by observing ourselves, and we discover that we have many thoughts. We are all the same at this level. What are these thoughts? They are nothing because we cannot define or locate or identify the thoughts as something like substance. But there is some identity, what we call our basic consciousness, which is always dealing with our thoughts. These thoughts should be flowing naturally, however, we are always interfering, becoming attached to a thought, which gives rise to a second, third thought and so on, and then these thoughts freeze and become something concrete for us. Our thoughts are also connected to our inner emotions, so usually we like, we don't like or we are just indifferent to something. We are continuously alternating between these three states and acting on our thoughts, trying to achieve something or reject something. That is the ordinary condition of our mind.

The training of the mind thus means that we discover that condition and, first of all, we try to calm the confusion of our thoughts through *shine* or *shamatha* practice. *Shine* practice means working with fixation or through observation of breathing in order to calm our mind. The first result is that we identify less with our thoughts. When we live an ordinary life, we are our thoughts; thoughts arise and we follow them. Of course, if we are practitioners, it is different because we try to observe thought when it is arising. When we do this Mahayana mind training such as *shine*, first of all, it calms the mind and

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then gives us awareness of thoughts arising and disappearing, like a continuous chain arising and disappearing. Once we succeed in calming our thoughts, we can also calm our emotions because emotions come from our thoughts.

This is what we do in sitting meditation practice and is a very important point. If we don't apply that mind training, then it is very difficult to succeed in higher levels of practice. For that reason, it can easily happen that even if we have some knowledge of the state of Dzogchen, in ordinary life, our emotions are still controlling and dominating us. Then things become difficult to deal with because we have not developed that basic capacity. If we don't have that capacity and we are aware of it, then we can apply it once again from the beginning: doing fixation with breathing, calming our mind, observing our thoughts, until the last breath of our life. Everything that we learn must be for our benefit.

The teaching of the Buddha is in order for us to become like Buddha and the base is, first of all, observing our mind and gradually working with it. When we train a little, then in daily life we can have the possibility to have more capacity. It is similar to learning to swim; we learn in a very calm sea, or in a swimming pool. Nobody is going to teach a baby to swim when the sea is very rough with big waves. In the same way, all our emotions and problems are similar to strong waves so it is very difficult to integrate directly with that kind of situation if we haven't learned the basic principles of practice. This is an important point for all practitioners and also the second training of the Mahayana teachings.

The third point of Mahayana training is called *prajna*, which can have different meanings according to the context. But in general, in Mahayana *prajna* means a real knowledge of phenomena mostly related to an understanding of the condition of emptiness. When we go more deeply into Vajrayana teaching that emptiness is just one aspect, like a base. It already has the potentiality of what is called luminous mind and is related to discovery of that condition. In the same way in Atiyoga Dzogchen teachings, training in *prajna* means recognition of the real primordial state. Also, when we say *shine* and *lhagtong* meditation, *prajna* is related to *lhagtong*, and *lhagtong* means real knowledge or real discovery of our nature. So you see, these are important

points for our practice and in general for our Dzogchen community.

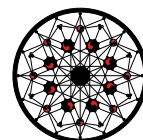
Continuation of the teaching

From the beginning, we have been following the teaching of Garab Dorje, the Buddhist lineage of Dzogchen. Garab Dorje said, "I give you direct introduction, and when you apply it, you can have a result". Even if it is not the supreme result, at least we can have some basic knowledge and realization which we can transmit and also help others. Otherwise we should not worry too much because the teaching has its own protectors and continuation. There are those who care for the transmission of the teaching, even if we don't see them.

So, each one of us has a great responsibility to apply and to put into practice what we have received from the teacher. This is our main duty. If we succeed in doing this, then there is a guarantee for the teaching to continue. But this does not mean thinking that only the Santi Maha Sangha instructors are the continuation. It is not like that and we should not be limited. We are all the same. It is just that we are different in the way that we have the capacity to apply something. All people, no matter whether they are young people or new people, if they have received teaching from Rinpoche, they are all equally important. Everybody in the Dzogchen Community is extremely important and precious. ©



INTERNATIONAL
DZOGCHEN COMMUNITY
GAKYIL



Thank You for Continuing to Be an IDC Member in 2024!

Dear Global Vajra Family,
We hope the year of the Wood Dragon has started well for you, and that it will bring peace, joy, health, and good fortune to all!

We are all grateful to be part of the Dzogchen Community, receiving teachings and collaborating with our Sangha. Maintaining our memberships is one of the primary ways we ensure the continuity of the Community and its activities throughout the world. The Wood Dragon year brings us another opportunity to renew our memberships and demonstrate our support and commitment to the Community and the Teachings. The International Gakyil thanks those of you who have already renewed

your membership for 2024, and encourages you to renew if you have not done so yet.

Many of the Gars and Lings offer you the opportunity to renew your membership directly online through your personal account. You can view and choose membership payment methods on dzogchen.net, by logging in to your personal account, and clicking on "Membership". Alternatively, you can contact your local Gar or Ling directly, which is the Gar or Ling closest to your geographical area of residence.

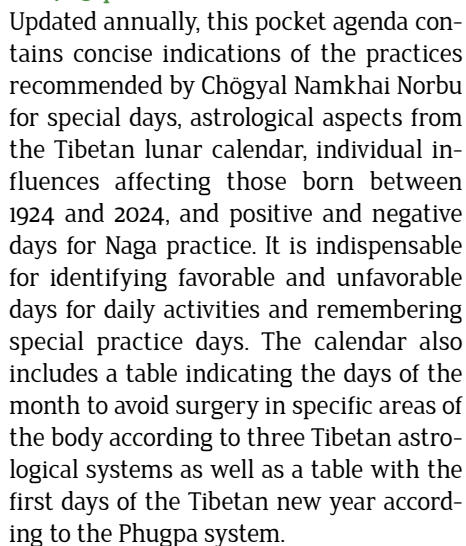
Thank you for taking the time to renew your membership for 2024. We also remind you that you have the opportunity to retroactively renew any previous membership years you may have missed – specifically 2021, 2022, and 2023 – as needed.

Best wishes.

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



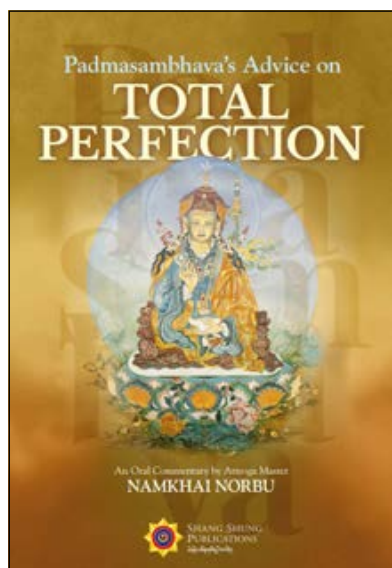
Recently published books



The Preliminaries of the Path of Ati
Longsal Commentary Series Volume Six
https://shop.shangshungfoundation.com/en/products/9788878342934_ebook-the-preliminaries-of-the-path-of-ati-pdf.html
The Preliminaries of the Path of Ati (A ti lam gyi sngon 'gro) is a special Vajrasattva purification practice received through dreams in 2003 and 2004 and related to the transmission of the Author's Root Guru Changchub Dorje (Byang chub rdo rje, 1863–1963). It belongs to the same genre of preliminary Longsal teachings as The Crucial Preliminaries of the Path of Ati (Ati'i lam gnad sngon 'gro), translated and published in Longsal Commentaries, Volume Three, and although it does not deal as exhaustively with the Purification of the Six Lokas and other aspects of the preliminary practices of Dzogchen as the latter, it is of particular importance as in its central part it focuses on the principle of the three dimensions, or tal (dal), of Guru Vajrasattva and elucidates the way to access them.

Supported by Ka-Ter Translation Project

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Upcoming books

In English

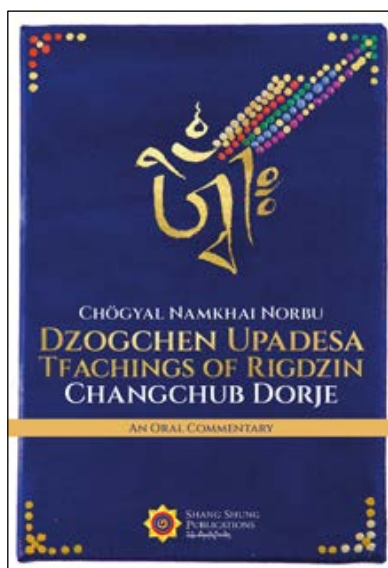
The Upadesha on the Total Behavior of Equal Taste

An Oral Commentary

The present volume contains the oral commentary to The Upadesha on the Total Behavior of Equal Taste belonging to the Longsal cycle of teachings rediscovered and taught by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. It is based on the transcript of the retreat in Tokyo, Japan, 1–5 June, 2012, with additional notes from the retreat in Tashigar North, Venezuela, 15–16 May, 2004.

“In general, when we learn any kind of teaching, such as Sutra, Vajrayana or Dzogchen, there are three aspects. In particular, when we are following a path, these are called tawa, gumpa and chöpa in Tibetan, which means point of view, application and attitude. These three aspects are of fundamental importance for those who follow the teaching and practice it. Why are they important? Because as human beings following the teaching, we have three levels of existence: our physical body, our energy level (also called voice), and mind. Therefore, whatever teaching we follow we should deal with these three levels of existence. For that reason, the teaching has three aspects.”

Supported by Ka-Ter Translation Project



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”.

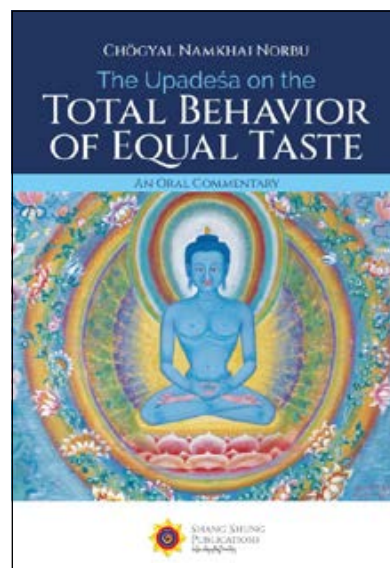
The Vajra Dance of Space

This book presents the translation of two texts on two different forms of the Vajra Dance of Space (mkha' klong rdo rje'i gar). Both were received by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu as part of the cycle of teachings known as The Luminous Clarity of the Universe, Heart Essence of the Dakinis (Klong chen 'od gsal mkha' 'gro'i snying thig).

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.



In Italian

Raccolta di insegnamenti Upadesha sul Rushen del corpo, della voce e della mente

Il testo che segue comprende alcuni insegnamenti Dzogchen upadesha, trasmessi da Chögyal Namkhai Norbu ai suoi discepoli durante la sua vasta e intensa attività di Maestro. Questo libro raccoglie la maggior parte degli insegnamenti relativi al Rushen del corpo, della voce e della mente

Libro realizzato con il sostegno di Merigar West

La chiarezza luminosa dell'universo. Una chiara esposizione del Tregchöd primordialmente puro

La luminosa chiarezza dell'universo: una chiara esposizione del principio del tregchöd primordialmente puro (Ka dag khregs chod kyi dgongs pa gsal bshad klong chen 'od gsal) è uno dei primi libri sullo Dzogchen scritti da Chögyal Namkhai Norbu (1938–2018). Secondo le sue note biografiche egli completò la prima versione il 28 aprile 1965, mentre viveva ancora a Roma, e originariamente lo concepì come un compendio di istruzioni tratte dai principali tantra della serie dello Dzogchen Upadesha e dagli scritti di Longchenpa (1308–1364) e Jigmed Lingpa (1730–1798) sulla base di conoscenze ed esperienze personali.

Libro realizzato con il sostegno di Merigar West

Scoprire uno per scoprire tutto. La pratica dello stato primordiale

Tra i testi tibetani appartenenti alla serie dello Dzogchen Semde, si considera che quelli più antichi siano le prime cinque traduzioni di Vairochana, ovvero Rigpai Khjug, Tsalchen Trugpa, Khyungchen Dingwa, Dola Serzhün, Minubpai Gyaltsen (chiamato anche Dorje Sempa Namkha Che) più il Mejung: quindi in totale sei volumi. In tempi relativamente recenti, nel 1971, è stato scoperto un altro libro che contiene le istruzioni essenziali sul modo di applicare la pratica nel puro stile Dzogchen in accordo con i sei testi citati. L'autore di questo volume non è noto, ma può essere attribuito a Nubchen Sangye Yeshe.

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I preliminari della via dell'Ati

Commenti del Longsal volume sesto

I preliminari della via dell'Ati (A ti lam gyi sngon 'gro) è una speciale pratica di purificazione di Vajrasattva ricevuta attraverso vari sogni tra il 2003 e il 2004 e legata alla trasmissione che l'Autore ricevette dal suo Guru radice, Changchub Dorje (Byang chub rdo rje, 1863–1963).

Libro realizzato con il sostegno di Merigar West

In Spanish

Como Publicaciones Shang Shung estamos colaborando con la Comunidad Dzogchen de habla hispana para recrear el grupo de traducción al español.

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Evolucionar

Libros que se publicarán en 2024

El Yoga de Tara Verde

Abrir nuestra mente

Gurú Yoga

Yantra Yoga

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Quando penso alla danza
mi viene il sole in testa

From Asia to Italy

Not many are aware that a significant part of ASIA's work takes place in Italy, benefiting children, youth, and civil society as a whole. These activities stem from the aspiration to disseminate Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's vision in Italy, contributing to the development of awareness about the interdependence that connects all living beings and the responsibility of each individual towards oneself, others, and the environment, with the aim of creating a culture of peace and tolerance that fosters the construction of a fairer and more inclusive society.

We initiated these initiatives many years ago with projects aimed at raising awareness about Tibetan culture and cooperation for development through exhibitions, conferences, publications, and experiential paths for students and civil society. We delved into a wide range of topics, from the traditions of Tibetan nomadic herders to traditional Tibetan medicine, from the delicate ecosystems of the Himalayas to contemporary expressions of Tibetan art.

Since 2019, we have expanded the focus of our projects to include, in addition to the intercultural aspect, awareness-raising on environmental sustainability and socio-emotional well-being. The main goal is to respond to the growing need for self-awareness, empathy, emotional regulation, and conflict management, particularly evident in children, youth, and the most vulnerable segments of the population, and exacerbated by the consequences of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.

Currently, we support schools of all levels in disseminating soft skills, such as relational competencies like emotional education, awareness of one's inner world, and empathic communication, which are fundamental to individual psychophysical well-being.

We are happy and proud to implement these pathways in schools, including some activities taught by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu:

- * The "kumar kumari" for young students in primary schools has received great appreciation from school staff for its beneficial impact on children. The reduction of stress and aggression and the sense of grounding and calm improve the atmosphere of the entire class, making this activity one of the most requested by schools.

- * The "khaita" dances. With the ongoing "WE ARE ONE" project, we have been able to experience this activity with students at a primary school in Rome, and it has been a great success. The harmony and joy generated by the dances have captivated the children and improved their mood and sociability, two fundamental aspects in a period when emotional distress is widespread among young people.

Other pathways through which we disseminate the values of the Buddhist tradition, such as mindfulness, creative workshops for socio-emotional education, and environmental education, are also included.

From 2019 to the present day, we have been able to implement these projects thanks to funding from AICS (Italian Agency for Development Cooperation) and the funds of the Italian Buddhist Union. 7,354 people, including students and teachers, have benefited from these activities in schools and have come into contact with the teachings of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu and the values of Tibetan culture.

Unfortunately, very little attention is paid to this work that ASIA is carrying out in civil society in order to create a more harmonious world, and today, our activities for 2024 and 2025 are endangered by the lack of new funding. ©



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Insight into Khaita Joyful Dances

Adriana Dal Borgo recounts the origins of the Joyful Dances and how they can lead us, step by step, to bring presence and harmony into our daily lives.

Adriana Dal Borgo

The birth and development of the *Khaita* project corresponds to a phase in which the International Dzogchen Community sought greater integration with the local area, represented by the celebrations on the occasion of Merigar's 30th anniversary in 2011. It was the first time that 'our' activities were held not only in the Association's facilities but also in the public squares of the surrounding villages. Demonstrations of Vajra Dance and Yantra Yoga, evenings with dance performances, singing and concerts performed by Community artists from all over the world impressed the local people, who were surprised that Buddhists or "Tibetans", as they called us, knew how to do anything other than meditate....

And it is precisely sound, in the form of singing, and movement, with dance, that are the characteristics of *Khaita* – Harmony in Space: a project created by Dzogchen Master Chögyal Namkhai Norbu and developed with the collaboration of people in the Community from around the world.

The project consists of singing and dancing together a selection of about 400 songs and 250 dances. They use forms and content from Tibetan culture but are then expressed with choreography developed by dancers from different cultural backgrounds, thus taking on a cross-cultural character.

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu devoted the last years of his life to perfecting and disseminating this Teaching, the value of which, as well as the different possibilities of application, is gradually revealed, like the many facets of a diamond.

A key word in the project is "harmony", represented by the Tibetan word *Khaita*: 'ta' translates as harmony but also has the semantic meaning of melody, while 'kha' means space.

Countless scientific studies demonstrate the health benefits of singing and



dancing, activities that involve harmonizing both the physical body and the mind with each other.

Singing stimulates the production of immunoglobulins, dopamine, melatonin and endorphins. In this way it strengthens the immune system, is relaxing, analgesic, and aids memory and the ability to concentrate.

Dancing increases proprioceptive awareness, stimulates the circulatory and respiratory systems, increases neuromuscular efficiency and coordination, improves balance helping to prevent injuries and falls, stimulates memory, and prevents the onset of some degenerative diseases.

Dancing together also promotes social interaction.

One example among many: a recent study, published in the Neuroscience journal, <https://neurosciencenews.com/dancing-cognition-mental-health-25601/> showed that dancing, more than other physical activities, improves mental and cognitive health. Research results indicated improvements in emotional well-being, depressive states, motivation, and cognitive functions such as memory, in all age groups and even in individuals with chronic diseases.

The originality of the *Khaita* project, however, lies in its use of song and dance as a meditative practice through training in presence and mindfulness, from which a naturally joyful condition arises. In fact, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu chose the name



"*Khaita* Joyful Dances" in which the word "joy" refers to the arising of a condition of relaxation and deep harmony, independent of short-lived situations and circumstances. To find or rediscover a stable condition of joy, we must look within ourselves instead of chasing external results that bring only temporary benefits. The function of *Khaita* is similar to that of the mirror, a tool that allows us to observe ourselves and a symbol frequently used by the Master to show us how to discover the potential of our true nature.

The term 'harmony-melody' thus takes on a deep meaning, related to the principle of evolution:

"We live on this planet with many other persons. Evolution means to develop the understanding of one's own nature without being too much conditioned by dualistic vision. In this way we shall become very good living examples for society (..) A lot of people speak about peace (...) but how can we have peace in the world if we do not open up and we only think in terms of "me" or "us" or we always wish to change something or someone? To have peace, we need evolution and this must develop in the condition of every single person".

Namkhai Norbu "Evolution and our responsibility to all sentient beings" in *The Mirror* No. 123
<http://melong.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/TheMirror123.pdf>

The essence of Dzogchen practice is to dwell in contemplation in every moment, in every aspect of our existence, consisting of the physical body, voice or energy and mind.

Leading us in the same direction is the etymological origin of the word joy, from the Latin word *gaudio*. We read in the Encyclopedia Treccani: *Intense joy, especially of a spiritual or religious nature*.

It is not easy to achieve this goal. It cannot be achieved through reasoning or

» continued on the following page



Khaita dancers in the Gönpa at Dzamling Gar.

» continued from previous page

analysis by following the movements of the mind, but only by training in presence.

When we act “blindly” by chasing thoughts or on the wave of emotions, we can be the cause of confusion, tension and problems for ourselves and others. Instead, training in presence means learning not to be conditioned by it, to act with “clarity”.

Movement is part of our condition, our life, from the moment we are born: the cells of our body are constantly regenerating. Not only the physical body is in movement and transformation but also the emotions and thoughts that continually arise.

A method that gives us the tools to bring presence into movement, thus into every single moment of our lives, can be considered like a jewel. *Khaita* gives us the tools for this training.

At first, especially while we are learning, we have to work hard to understand how to do the steps, to move our arms, to orient ourselves to new movements, but as we become more familiar with the dances, we can simply be present and relaxed in the movement and music. Gradually, presence will extend to all moments of our life until there is no separation between it and the moment of practice or meditation. Life becomes a dance.

“Milarepa said every movement is yantra lyogal. I say that every movement is dance.” Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, Dzamling Gar 2013.

Music is sound plus rhythm. Knowing how to recognize and follow a rhythm is essential: rhythm creates a melody that ac-

companies the voice in singing and guides the steps and movements in dancing; it anchors our mind and compels us, lest we get out of the timing, to be attentive and not distracted. To stay in step with the rhythm, the mind can no longer digress by getting lost in memories of past situations or expectations of the future but has to remain in the present.

And it is this training that will lead us, step by step, to bring presence and harmony into our daily lives. We will cope more appropriately with difficult situations, we will know how to release tension, we will be more relaxed and aware, and our lives will be easier and more joyful.

By regaining inner harmony, dance movements become softer, relaxed, precise. Through melody we tune in and resonate as a group. Through choreography that requires synchronized movements and gestures, we develop awareness of each other, of us, and of the space around us. Many *Khaita* dances are performed in a circle, a very interesting and meaningful figure. To create a circle requires the contribution of each dancer: we must all be careful to keep the same distance from each other and a constant distance from the center. We must also keep the circle in the center of the space in which we dance. The circle arises from everyone’s awareness and collaboration. *Khaita* is therefore also collaboration, respect, and group harmony.

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu was a scholar and a great expert in his native culture. In *Khaita* he transferred some pearls of his knowledge: in the choice of songs and in

the extensive commentaries on the lyrics, which are rich in insights and connections to various fields of culture (history, geography, art, etc.). It is interesting to see how he chose to organize the song collections, following the principles of Tibetan astrology of the elements.

This is the other motive behind the *Khaita* project: supporting Tibetan language and culture, which is now in danger of extinction.

Each individual culture is unique and valuable, so why is Tibetan culture so important?

Those who follow a Buddhist tradition know that the complete collection of all the Buddha’s teachings have come down to us in Tibetan, the language into which they were translated from Sanskrit thanks to the work of ancient scholars: if knowledge of this language disappeared, we would lose the possibility of direct access to the precious original texts.

A language is also an expression and vehicle of the culture from which it came. The civilization of the Tibetan plateau possesses thousands of years of profound knowledge in many fields of learning, which has remained unaltered due to its isolation brought about by particular geographical conditions. This heritage also comes to us through the songs and dances selected in the *Khaita* collections. From the lyrics of the songs we thus discover that Tibetan culture is the custodian of universal values that are precious to all humanity: they speak to us of peace, love for one’s country, history and tradition, respect for the

environment, cooperation, tolerance. They show us a special understanding of man, always seen as an individual in relation to his or her environment, the universe, and the divine. A profound understanding that can only enrich our way of being in the world.



All the observations described so far are summarized in the symbol of *Khaita*.

The infinite knot, a line without interruption of continuity, without corners and golden like sunlight, harmoniously connects all points of the earth. The knot is inscribed in a circle representing our planet and all people. Similarly, the notes of music and melody travel as an uninterrupted flow of energy and love, a common universal language, carrying a message of peace and evolution.

Because of its versatility and variety of rhythms, melodies and choreography, there are several areas and fields of application for *Khaita*. Let's look at some of the projects that are taking place at this time.

In the project We Are One, organized by ASIA – Association for International Solidarity in Asia – <https://www.asia-ngo.org/progetto/siamo-uno/> – and funded by the Italian Buddhist Union, Joyful Dances are one of the activities aimed at children and teachers in some schools in Rome and the Mt. Amiata area. The project aims to *help create a more inclusive society that is aware of the web of connections that exist between all living things, to encourage more responsible behavior, and to develop a more empathetic and connected self with others and the environment.*

Khaita Joyful Dances were the subject of a dissertation for a PhD at the University of Salzburg in the Department of Music and Dance Studies. An excerpt from the thesis will soon be published by Shang Shung Publishing House. The text provides a broad overview of the origin and devel-

opment of *Khaita* as well as insights into its principles; it also presents interesting academic research.

In Poland, *Khaita* is one of the subjects in the Certified School for Coaches and the Self-Development Course (open self-development course) at the ICC (International Coaching Community), as it helps develop so-called soft skills, emotional skills such as self-control, self-awareness, social skills, and empathy.

Also in Poland, *Khaita* is one of the activities of Values Schools, a 3-year project aimed at principals and teachers in public schools to develop teachers' awareness of how to work in different dimensions in daily life. The Dances have also been offered to students as an open activity on particular dates in the school curriculum.

and *Khaita* and mindfulness. <https://khaita.org/exploring-khaita/>.

In our online platforms you can find entire collections of songs with all the lyrics, both in the original language and in *drajyor*, a phonetic transcription system that makes it easy to read the transcription from Tibetan and be able to sing along. You can also find their translations and comments by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu.

In our YouTube channel you will also find tutorials and pre-recorded lessons, demonstration videos of the dances and performances, and various presentation videos. Among many, I recommend watching this one: <https://youtu.be/xRNCCdzJmEM?si=UFVWicVKHAITAHAITALDbP7EeG>

We are waiting for you to dance together!!!



Children performing *Khaita* dances at Dzamling Gar for Losar 2017.

Although practiced by non-professional dancers, Joyful Dances have always attracted significant interest wherever they have been presented. Thus, we have been invited to participate in various performances, sometimes to present the cultural aspect, "Tibetan-ness", sometimes to share the cross-cultural approach and the message of harmony, cooperation and joy they convey.

The best way to understand *Khaita* is to experience it firsthand. One convenient option is Exploring *Khaita*, an online program that offers weekly classes to learn the dances and one seminar per month that covers topics such as benefits according to medicine, aspects of Tibetan culture, singing and the healing power of sound,

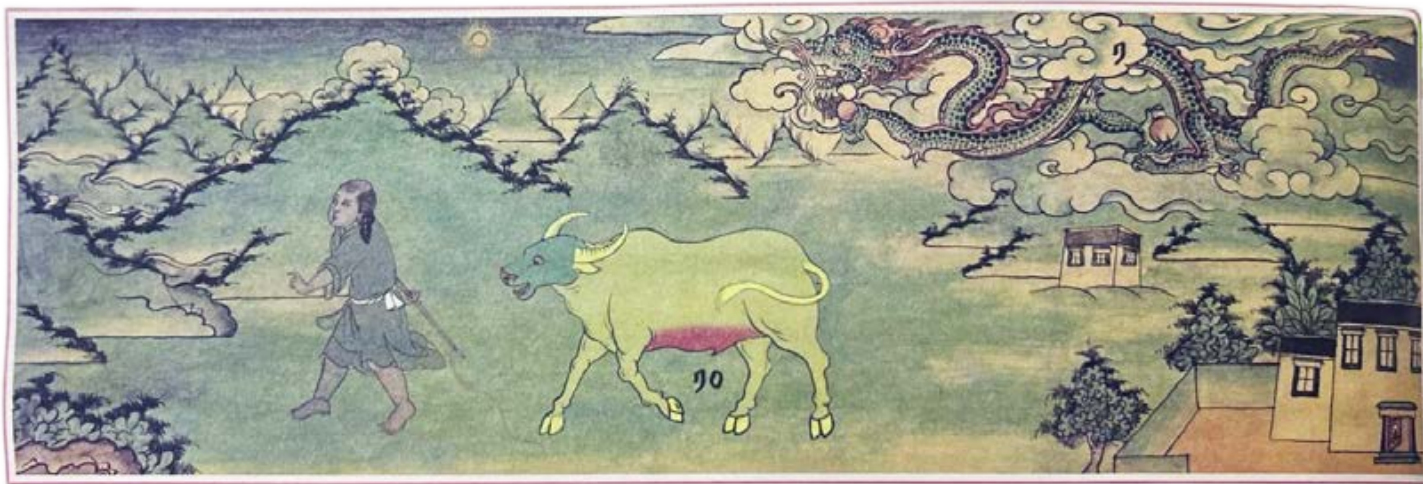
Links to our platforms and available materials

<https://khaita.org/>
<https://KHAITAhaitahaita.com/collections/barsam>
<https://www.youtube.com/user/HarmonyInTheSpace>
https://shop.shangshungfoundation.com/en/products/9788878341357_message-from-tibet-through-songs-and-dances.html
https://shop.shangshungfoundation.com/en/products/2000000008882_collected-comments-on-the-songs-in-message-from-tibet.html

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Ox Divination for the Wood Dragon Year

Dr Phuntsog Wangmo

Dzamling Gar 2024

First of all, I want to say Happy Losar – in Tibetan, Losar Tashi Deleg – to all. Today I'd like to share with you a little bit of what is coming this year based on Tibetan astrology.

The purpose of consulting astrology is so that we can prepare and thus avoid problems in our own condition and also in our environment. While astrology is a huge topic to study, today I will present something very simple, in order to make it a little easier.

The Ox Divination for the year is represented by an ox and a cowherd. The ox represents the general universe while the cowherd represents the beings within it. We have the outer dimension, where we live, and within that dimension we have humans and other beings: the outer nature and inner nature.

Both the ox and the cowherd have different elements and colors each year, such as the color of the body, the mouth, the ears. The body of the ox represents a universal continent and the eight or ten directions. The eight directions are East, West, Southwest, Northwest, Northeast, Southeast, North, South, and with the sky and the earth, there are ten directions. The ox represents the earth, the dragon (in the sky) represents the water (amount of rain) while the oxherd represents humans, their lives, their economic situation, health, and so on.

To explain the astrology of this year using the ten directions, different parts of the body of the ox represent the global continents. The change in colors of the ox happens every year and the colors indicate bad, good or neutral conditions depending on the individual region and individual humans.

We also have to consider the "mother" cycle, "son" cycle, "friend" cycle, and "enemy" cycle. The mother cycle means protection; a mother has the capacity to protect her child. The son cycle means that the mother and son agree and get along. The friendship cycle is supportive in the way that a friend is a support especially when you have a problem. The enemy cycle tends to harm or manipulate you.

Those are four different aspects and when we consider our relatives, our friends and others we may see aspects that we consider to be enemies. For that reason, a certain part of the body of the ox has a certain color which refers to the year and certain parts of the continent that may not be gentle. The same is also true of the oxherd who represents the inner nature or sentient beings.

As I said, the ox represents the outer nature, therefore, that which is produced in nature, which is external. Nothing is produced within our body. Everything we rely on is external: food, [air for] breathing, and so on. The position of the ox lets us know if the natural resources for the year are more than enough, enough, or not enough.

Then there are different aspects of the oxherd such as certain types of clothing and his age: he may be old, or young, or middle aged. An old oxherd means that in that year the element of the wind [*lung*] is more predominant, middle-aged means the fire element is stronger, while the younger

oxherd means the earth and water element are predominant. Depending on the age of the oxherd, the water element has different meanings. The whip the oxherd carries represents a weapon and depending on how he is holding it, what material it is made of, indicates whether there will be a lot of movement, or a war. This year the whip is made of silk and it is facing down, meaning that the year will not be difficult. A gun ready to shoot means that an enemy is expected and something is about to happen.

This year, the color of the ox is yellow meaning there will be good crops and natural resources. People will be relatively satisfied with the quantity of food produced. Yellow represents the earth element that holds everything together.

We may have certain issues, like chronic disease. The head of the ox is green. In the first month of spring, summer, autumn, and winter we will have more wind. The effect of this wind movement is that things will grow better.

The abdomen of the ox is red. In this case, the middle of the continents will have more obstacles, more activities, and more anger particularly in the middle of the summer and the middle of the autumn. The last month of each season will be more challenging, and there will be dryness and less rain in the autumn, especially the second month of the autumn.

The tail is yellow, which generally indicates calmness, but the four legs of the ox are also yellow which may mean desert-like conditions and the lower valley regions will have more challenges or more dryness. The mouth of the ox is open and the tail goes from left to right and is a bit crooked. This means that the year is not so good for animals. If you are nomadic, like

the herders in Tibet, your animals will have some obstacles.

It is a good year for human beings. There will be more new children, and also more animal births. The oxherd for this year is young, like the children. This is positive for children, but not for middle aged people, and particularly not good for seniors because the element of *lung* is very high.

The color of the oxherd's clothes is a little greenish meaning that in general the economy is not very productive. The oxherd is wearing a belt, similar to traditional Tibetan attire, and it is white so there is some concern about enemies. The hair of the oxherd is in two braids behind the ears which means that things are generally fine.

The oxherd's shoes are red. He is not wearing the left shoe and it is tied to the right side of the belt. This means that men may be busier than women. The oxherd is running in front of the ox meaning that spring arrives a little earlier, animals will be able to feed earlier and are therefore happier. The number of the ox is ten, which means that there is more than enough production and that we will have a good autumn and good crops. In the sky we have one dragon, which means the rain may not be sufficient. This year the dragon represents the water element.

The other day I was listening to Rinpoche's teaching about the Garuda, and he said that while in Tibetan Medicine there are the five elements, in the Bön tradition the five elements are symbolized by four animals: the dragon, the lion, the garuda and the tiger, the four animals that we find today on the prayer flags.

Why do they represent the five elements with four animals? The animal is like life and has its full potential. When we talk about the five elements, each element has its own energy, its own active, healthy element. Rinpoche said that the dragon represents that water element so if there's one dragon it means that this year is not going to have a lot of rain.

In conclusion, the Ox prediction for the year is generally good. The food crops are fine, although there is a wind element of disturbance. The outer nature, the ox, is yellow representing the earth. The head is green representing wind. The abdomen is red showing the fire element, the middle regions, not too high or low, will have a drier climate. Particularly the summer and autumn and the second month of every season will have problems of drought. The horns, ears, and tail of the ox are yellow so

relatively everything is quite balanced. The four feet of the ox are yellow which is good for lands at lower altitude. The mouth of the ox is open and looking to the left which is not very positive for animals so milk for young animals is not so good.

The color of the oxherd's clothes is green indicating wind so this year looks like we're going to have a lot of wind. If that is the case, if you are already a "wind" personality or if you have difficulty sleeping or concentrating, or if you like to talk a lot, to move a lot, your mind is not able to relax, if you already have a tendency to restlessness or abnormal mental energy, then you need to be careful. To be careful does not mean to stay in a room with a locked door. It means we should be careful with what we do. We should eat good food, move well, not discuss heavy topics, not go where people are fighting, not drink alcohol. We should try not to drink a lot of ginger tea or hot spicy tea or do a lot of heavy exercise. And in particular, we should be more careful in late spring and or middle autumn. If you follow these indications it will help to prevent problems.

Instead of drinking ginger tea, you can drink some saffron tea. Instead of staying under the sun, maybe you can stay in a shady place. Instead of staying late at a party, you can stay peacefully at home, drink some tea with a good companion. Any kind of discussions, like fighting, discussing, heavy things will be harmful.

If you are born in the year of the Dragon – there are Fire Dragons, Water Dragons, Wood Dragons, Earth Dragons [depending on the year of birth] – this year is positive if you are a Water Dragon. If you are an Earth Dragon, you need to be a little careful especially for your health because this year is the Wood Dragon and the Wood element is enemy to the Earth element. If you are a Fire Dragon, then the year should be all right although you should not initiate fighting.

If you were born in the year of the Dragon, this year is your *keg* [*skeg lol*] year [the return of the animal of the year of birth which is less favorable]. Therefore it's good to do your best. You can hang a number of prayer flags equivalent to your age. It is also good to save the lives of animals. If you don't find animals to save you can give to charities, animal charities, homeless charities, refuge charities, cancer charities, and so on. It would also be positive to fix or help to fix something that the Dzogchen Community needs.

You can also wear something that corresponds to the Earth element since the Dragon's element is Earth. For that reason this year it will be better not to wear bright colors or the color green. It will be better to wear blue, something related to the water element. White is good, blue is good, dark blue is good, but even if you don't have clothes in these colors, it would be good to put on something symbolic. Changing the element does not require huge changes. What we need is something symbolic to harmonize.

The year is not only a little heavy for those born in the Dragon year, but also for those born in the year of three other animals. For those born in the year of the Dog the year is a little heavy because the Dog is like the second home of the Dragon. If you are a Dog, you need to be careful, especially if someone is accusing you, blaming you, or taking you to court. It's not necessarily that you have done something, but someone is blaming you. The Dragon and Dog are loud, so if they are yelling at each other no one listens. Hence if these two are in disagreement, it's good to do, for example, *Odser Jenma* practice, in order to open the path.

There are two other animals who will have some issues of health – the Ox and the Sheep. The Ox and the Sheep are the fourth animals, counter clockwise and clockwise, from the Dragon. For them it would be good to do some Medicine Buddha practice or long-life practice. In particular, if you know which personality you belong to, if you know which element is more predominant for you, based on this you can drink a different tea, wear different clothes, do something different, but simply you can also do practice.

In conclusion, those born in the year of the Dragon need to be careful and try to do more practice connected to your life. If you are born in the year of the Dog, it is good to do *Odser Jenma* practice to strengthen your energy and also to put up prayer flags. If you are an Ox or a Sheep your health is more of an issue, so make sure you have a good diet and if there's something wrong, consult a doctor early so illness can be prevented. As Rinpoche always said, working with circumstances is important. Another thing Rinpoche said many times is that the best practice is Guruyoga, so that is the best. ©

Interview with Dr. Phuntsog Wangmo

Director of Shung Stung Institute School
of Tibetan Medicine
March 16, 2024, Dzamling Gar

A Brief History and Current Status of the Shang Shung Institute School of Tibetan Medicine

The Mirror: Dr Wangmo, can you tell us a little bit about the school's history in general and then specifically about the three main programs that we have in Tsegylgar East, Massachusetts, USA, Dzamling Gar here in Tenerife and Moscow in Russia. Firstly, can you give us a brief history of the Tibetan Medical School?

Dr. Phuntsog Wangmo: Thank you. I think we could start from the very early 80's, when Rinpoche first had the idea of the medical school. I was at the Shang Shung Institute in Italy in the beginning of the 90's and then I went to [North] America, so I will start from there.

The Shang Shung Institute School of Tibetan Medicine officially began the four-year program in 2005 at Tsegylgar East. That was the first class. So from 2005 until now we have graduated a good number of people, maybe not as many as we would have liked due to various issues, one reason being that the four-year program is too long a commitment for people. Still I am really so happy, even if each class wasn't a big class, and even it was not such a financial success, today we have people who have knowledge of Tibetan Medicine. So in that sense we were very successful.

M: How many classes completed the four-year program?

PW: In five years we graduated four groups up until now in Massachusetts. In 2018, Rinpoche gave a certificate to teach to four graduates of the program here at Dzamling Gar. [<https://melong.com/activities-of-the-school-of-tibetan-medicine-in-usa/> see article] This is really good for the school so at least I have someone who can help me teach.

In 2012 we started, under Rinpoche's guidance, the second School of Tibetan Medicine in Russia, at the main seat of Kunsangar, and there we have graduated one group. In Russia there are a good number



of people and the program is more successful in terms of numbers. We have about six people who became teachers and among those six people, two of them are now here with me in Dzamling Gar taking care of the school. Others are teaching in Kunsangar [see photos] so this has been really successful and at the moment I have about ten graduate students who teach and help move the program forward. I am very grateful for this, so I take this opportunity to really thank all the graduate students who help me to teach and care for the school.

Around 2017, we started the Dzamling Gar Medical School, but as you know since Rinpoche chose this place, he was always planning the Tibetan Medical School of Dzamling Gar, in the south of Tenerife. Before we purchased this place, we did some activities in the north of the island, where we held a conference on Tibetan culture and medicine in 2015. [<https://melong.com/tibetan-medicine-in-tenerife/>] Many Tibetan doctors participated. So now we do our best to achieve Rinpoche's vision.

In Dzamling Gar we have the director Ilaria Faccioli; she is a wonderful person with very high capacity and she is tirelessly taking care of the school here. In Russia there is Vladimir Belyaev, who is such a wonderful person doing the same. These two people are very stable and so I thank them and because of them we are able to keep these schools alive. Without Ilaria and Vladimir's commitment to the program, we could not keep going. The same is also true in Tsegylgar [East] where we have had ups and downs and some problems, but always someone shows up who has a commitment to Rinpoche. So I want to take this opportunity to say thank you.

I also want to say thank you to the three Gars where the medical school is located. Without the support of these three Gars we might not be here today. We contribute as much as we can, but these Gars are very generously supporting us.

M: So you have the medical program which is the school to train Tibetan doctors and then you offer other kinds of courses, so can you explain a little bit about the relationship of those courses to the program?

PW: Tibetan Medicine is the same as any other medical study. It is a five year program. The first part of the study is more general and then we go to the different specialties like herbology, pharmacology, internal and external disease. The specialty the student chooses is based on their capacity or interest.

At the beginning we had the four-year program, which is really a five year program, because we also go to Tibet for internships. The four-year program is mainly designed for someone who wants to become a Tibetan medical doctor. It does not mean that one day the person graduates and becomes a perfect doctor. It is a lifelong knowledge, not something that we ever finish, but at least you have the basic idea of what the body consists of and medicines, diseases, causes, conditions, diet, behavior, etc.

Now we are offering shorter workshops of a specific specialty, like diet. Also I wanted to do a caretakers program related to hospice and the dying process. We are still working on that, and we started here [in Dzamling Gar] with a workshop called Embracing Death. I started writing that curriculum for caretakers, which consists of three parts, in Massachusetts. First is the Buddhist aspect, to understand the dying process, the acceptance of death, the second is more related to Tibetan Medicine and the third is combining Buddhism and Tibetan Medicine, to understand how to make the dying person and the beloved family member who stays with that person comfortable.

We offered the three parts in the workshop Embracing Death. Steven Landsberg started with two days related to Buddhism and death. Stephen is such a beloved teacher in the Community and he accepted to collaborate, so he did the first two days, I did the second two days, the Tibetan Medicine aspect and then Ilaria did the the last part on grief. Ilaria has a lot of talent and knowledge. What she went through last year, the suffering of the loss of her son, is beyond, so I thought it would be really



Embracing Death, workshop with Dr Phuntsog Wangmo, Ilaria Faccioli and Steven Landsberg.

good if she could say something through her experience. I hope we can develop this more and do more of these programs since it is very useful.

We also have these external therapies like Ku Nye. Ku Nye is a very special Tibetan medical external therapy, so even to do Ku Nye takes training. The practitioner needs to know the general aspects of the body, the elements, which kind of condition is related to the complaints, what that means, what is related to the element, how to choose which point to work on; Ku Nye is a very complete knowledge. We also have other external therapies like moxibustion and compresses – hot, cold and warm compresses. The people who have received Ku Nye treatments all over the world feel great benefit.

In the Russian school we recently finished a Ku Nye training and over 40 people participated. We did two separate programs, one at Kunsangar, where our school has its seat, and the other in Irkutsk, eastern Russia. There is another group there because one of our teachers is a Western medical doctor and lives in that area.

There are three levels of Ku Nye, and at the end of the third level we give a certificate. Ku Nye is also part of the curriculum for the Tibetan medical students who want to become doctors. We also have a program on diet which also has three levels,

This year the Tibetan Medical School in the US changed the four-year program. We will break it down into two parts: the first

year and a half we mainly focus on diet and nutrition and then after that people who stay in the program can have some professional training and move to the pathologies.

In the future I'm also hoping to divide the program into three parts, but at the moment we have divided into two parts. This year we have good attendance. This structure is still new, but I think it could work in a better way. My young colleagues say we should do in this way, so I go with that because it's a different generation with different experiences. Matthew Schmookler, Adam Okerblom, and Leela Parker, who have been active graduates with the US medical school for many years, said maybe we should try in this way.

M: Will you be doing that internationally or only in the United States?

PW: Internationally no, since from the beginning we don't have the four-year program in Tenerife, so here we are just doing the diet in three levels, Ku Nye in three levels, and then we have these women's health workshops which we really want to develop because women's health is really important and now we have this end of life care.

We had the four-year program in Russia at Kunsangar, but since 2018 and Covid, many things happened, so we were not able to restart the four-year program until October of this year. People have been waiting for the four-year program, so in

the meantime we have had diet and external therapies. We also do short workshops.

Since we receive a lot of from the Dzogchen Communities, we try and give back by offering free webinars every four or five months. We offer webinars by zoom and invite guests to give advice on diet, behavior, breathing, meditation, and our guests have been Yantra Yoga, Vajra Dance and Santi Maha Sangha teachers, and other medical professionals.

Since this job is a gift from my guru, I try my best to move ahead. It is not always easy. I see why Rinpoche wanted to continue Tibetan Medicine in the West, the nature of Tibetan medicine and the nature of today's samsara, Tibetan medicine can be beneficial for modern times. Rinpoche gave me this job, so for me it is really easy to be responsible and try my best. There is always help from the Community, for example, Oliver Leick will always be part of the School of Tibetan Medicine. He has always helped like a mother for the school. Whenever we have problems we go to him and he gives help, especially financially.

During the Mandarava retreat, people told me that in the regions where they live there is no Ku Nye, external therapies or Tibetan Medicine. I really want to use this opportunity to encourage people to study and practice Tibetan Medicine. English language speakers can study in the US, Russian language speakers and people from

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Eastern Europe can study at Kunsangar, and Spanish speakers in Tenerife. Tibetan Medicine is a good knowledge for you and to help to others.

Many people worry that Tibetan Medicine is not recognized by any government, but don't worry. It is not recognized because no one is practicing it. If more people practice and receive Tibetan Medicine, the government will recognize it. If many people request it, the government will consider it and then the permission will come. If there is no interest, there is no reason for the government to consider it. They do not know Tibetan Medicine even exists.

Like traditional Chinese medicine, Ayurvedic medicine, homeopathy naturopathy, all these kinds of medicines, including Western medicine, if no one is familiar or using these medical systems, there is no reason for the government to look into recognizing it. All these disciplines have worked very hard to become legitimate and also the people who use these methods pressure governments to recognize them.

In the US, Tibetan doctors have formed the American Tibetan Medical Association [ATMA] <https://americantibetanmedicalassociation.org/> to check how Tibetan Medicine can become legalized. We talked to many lawyers and professionals. They told us that now it is too early to go to the legislators. They asked how many practitioners are actively practicing and how many consumers there are. They did not say that Tibetan Medicine is illegal. They said that we can practice and if something happens, it is our own responsibility.

In the US Chinese Medicine became legal in some states in 1973. At that time there were over a thousand practitioners just on the West Coast and today there are some 3000. Still people do not know Tibetan Medicine, they don't have any experience. Some people think you have to be Buddhist, or we are just giving a few herbs, so people have no idea of the breadth of Tibetan Medicine. So I am asking if you can look into studying and practicing Tibetan Medicine, it will be very good for you.

I am asking the different Gars to encourage people to become more familiar with Tibetan Medicine, to receive treatments and maybe even to study. We cannot survive without the help of the Community and the Gars through publicity, to put things about our new programs on the Community websites, send the programs out and when you're informing about all



February 15–18, 2024 Shang Shung Institute's School of Tibetan Medicine, the practice of the first module of the Ku-Nye external therapies program took place at Kunsangar, Russia.

Ku Nye Program at the Shang Shung Institute's School of Tibetan Medicine, Russia

February 15th–18th, 2024

Vladimir Belyaev

Director of Shang Shung Medical Program, Russia

The practice of the first module of the Ku-Nye external therapies program took place at the Russian branch of the Shang Shung Institute's School of Tibetan Medicine from February 15th to 18th, 2024. The main group of 34 students were trained in the classroom of the school in Kunsangar North in the Moscow region, and eight people studied the practice of Ku-Nye in Irkutsk, located in eastern Siberia near Lake Baikal.

Most of the students in the main group visited North Kunsangar for the first time and enjoyed learning about this place, its history, the founder, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, and enjoyed the quiet pine forest near Moscow, hung with lungta flags with a large white stupa in the middle of the trees.

The practical part of the course was taught by our wonderful teachers: Artyom Verny, Alexander Popov and Vladimir Bakshi. Professor Phuntsog Wangmo held essential online meetings with students.

The first module will end with an exam on May 30th, after which the second module of the program will begin. In between practical intensives, regular supportive online classes are held with teachers and Professor Phuntsog, and there is also a constant chat to discuss all unclear points.

The entire program will end with the third module in September 2024.

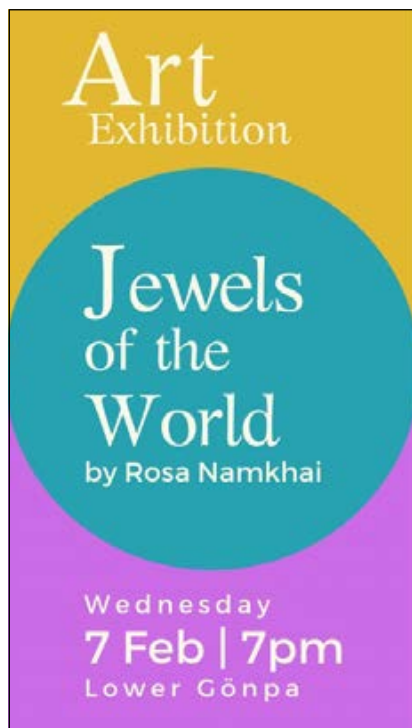
We are happy to see and teach such active, capable and motivated students who demonstrate great interest in learning Tibetan medicine and bringing health and benefit to living beings. ©

the activities of the Community, please include Tibetan Medicine.

Khandro [Rosa Namkhail] asks me every day to talk about Tibetan Medicine because many people don't know about the program, many people have already forgotten, many people never heard about it, and so we should inform people. She has also been researching how Tibetan Medicine could be

recognized. Khandro is really trying to put her energies to find how Tibetan Medicine can flourish. It's such a key support for me.

Please be with us, please understand us and put our information on your website or talk to people about Tibetan Medicine – for example I often ask the Yantra Yoga teachers to include Tibetan medicine in their presentations; how in Tibetan med-



Art Exhibition: Jewels of the World

By Rosa Namkhai
Presentation by Fabio Andrico

Opening on February 7, 2024 at
Dzamling Gar, Tenerife Island, Spain

The jewels are a rich collection of stamps from all countries, carrying a message from the past. They are called 'jewels' because they were collected and preserved with dedication and passion by Rinpoche, and this tradition continues through his family.

Perhaps this passion and dedication are still passed on to us. This is chronicled in the 40-year book of Merigar, which includes a collection of images, the history of all events, and details of retreats held in Merigar over the past four decades.

icine they talk about how breathing is good for health, how *tsjong* is good for the joints, etc. Please help to make Tibetan Medicine familiar to people's ears. We try our best to work and hopefully sometime soon we will be able to bring the wish of Rinpoche to fruition. So I want to say thank you for giving me this opportunity to share. Thank you. ©



Gloriana Brenes, Gakyil Director:

We have the great honor on this very special occasion to have for the first time, as far as I know, the art of Rosa Namkhai introduced by Fabio Andrico. We also would like to present this book, *The Forty Years of Merigar* [West] which is quite inspirational. The book is available from by donation. [Please contact the office of Merigar West to receive a copy: office@dzogchen.it]

Fabio Andrico:

Forty Years of Merigar

Welcome everyone. I will start by explaining about the book, *Forty Years of Merigar*, because in the real sense, all of the activities of our dear Rosa Namkhai, has one base. She has dedicated her entire life to the Community; to make Rinpoche's legacy more understandable to all. And since Merigar was the first Gar, like the seed, so she wanted to offer the history of Merigar, which is also the history of the Dzogchen Community. In this book, all the aspects of the Community are expressed in its words and the images. It would be really nice if everyone had a copy of the book.

At Merigar [West] is where a little structure of the Community started. Dzamling Gar was the last Gar Rinpoche created. If Merigar is the seed, then Dzamling Gar should be the expression of the capacity of collaboration at the level of the planet. Dzamling Gar is the Gar of communication



Gloriana Brenes Gonzalez (left) and Fabio Andrico presenting.

among all the Gars, and the Gars communicate with the Lings, and then it should be clear what is the intent of the Community. It is not that we are separate but we integrate in life, in society and in the world. So understanding the history of Merigar [West] can help us understand other aspects related to the Community.

Art Exhibit

The activity of Rosa Namkhai has always been based in her dedication to the Dzogchen Community and to help explain Rinpoche's dimension. All the stamps that are used in this artwork, the collection of the stamps, was started by Rinpoche. As I remember in the beginning Rinpoche started collecting stamps for a relative who liked to collect stamps. The stamps are from all over the world. If you look you can see all of these stamps are related to a certain epoch. It started with the form of the jewels and then the bigger jewels of the stupas. And then you find one that represents the museum of Merigar and Arcidosso all in one depiction.

So it was Rinpoche who started to collect the stamps and years so somehow there is a very very long history behind all these stamps. There is always this totally selfless contribution by Rosa. Rosa's activity can be an inspiration and a silent example of a more selfless, generous and altruistic way of living. ©



Mandarava Retreat

Dzamling Gar 2024

The traditional Mandarava retreat at Dzamling Gar spanned two weeks time, starting from Losar, with all the celebratory events connected to it from divination soup, star water baths, breakfast of khapse and tea, lunches, games, and practice and ending with a Mandarava Ganapuja and auction. The retreat went very smoothly thanks to the heroic efforts of the Gakyil, assistants, the ever present and dedicated karma yogis, the tireless Project Manager Elerin Uibu, the webcast team, the instructors Fabio Andrico, Dr Phuntsog Wangmo and Fabian Sanders, the Gekô, as well as the participation of our Umdzes, Sebastien Remy (who also coordinated the much appreciated videos of Rinpoche and together with Anton Rutkovsky, the new schedule app) and Naomi Zeitz, and the auctioneers Lena Dumcheva and Tim Cabot.

Approximately 1000 people registered on line; 200 people attended live and around 300 on line daily.

We received many thanks and compliments on the content and organization of the retreat. We are very grateful for all who participated from near and far and we hope that each year the retreat can provide what

seems to be a very beneficial and joyful experience for everyone.

Below are some of the comments from online participants:

Mandarava retreat Hello dear ones! Many thanks for the organization, conduct and valuable contribution of your hearts and experience of instructors! These were some of the best days of my life. Thanks again with respect and gratitude.

Thank you SO much for your effort. It was a wonderful retreat.

Thank you very much for so much love and at the same time professionalism in how you handled the entire event! A huge hug for this entire team that made it possible to reach many people. Of course to Gakyil and its impeccable organization! Thank you beloved Master!

Hello to the Gakyil and all participants in this marvelous retreat.

Thank you to the teachers and there dedication and great patience to teach us again and again...Thank you to Rinpoche our Master. Many, many Wishes to all.

Thank you so much for the amazing work you're doing to allow us enjoy our Master's precious teachings and practices. THANK YOU!

Please pass on immense gratitude to the webcast team for such an amazing effort. And to all of the Dzamling Gar team – the retreat has been a life-changing experience!!! Thank you so much!

Thank you for such a great effort with this retreat, it's a wonderful experience! I'm

participating from Australia and rely on the recording of some sessions to keep up with the teachings.

Thank you so much for arranging this retreat – you've done an amazing job!

Thank you so much for this retreat. I am aware of the preciousness of the teachings and the amazing work all the team is doing. The App is a great tool. Thank you so much. It makes it easier for time zone changes.

Wonderful retreat, thank you.

Thank you for this wonderful retreat I participated in per Zoom whenever I could.

Thank you for making it possible to participate online. Though physically far here in Cairns, Australia I felt near in spirit and energy. The retreat program was wonderful.

Hello dear ones! Many thanks for the organization, conduct and valuable contribution of your hearts and experience of instructors! These were some of the best days of my life. ©



Yantra Yoga First Level Teacher Training at Dzamling Gar

Logan Mikyö Clark

It can be easy to forget just how close we are to the great masters of the past. To lose sight of the continuity of practice and transmission that ties us to them. Most of us can't really comprehend the great sacrifices made by these teachers that enabled the teachings to come to us. But when we meet someone like Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, we have the chance to glimpse what is involved in maintaining this lineage on this planet.

We're in Dzamling Gar amidst the five elements. Waves crashing ashore at Roca Negra, rolling forward before the riptide drains them back, bringing the sea level up and down a few meters with each pulse of the tide. The wind howling as it blows in African desert sand from the east. The sun shining brightly nearly every day. As the attendees begin arriving the whole place brightens with a sense of devotion and joyful familiarity.

On the first day of our Teacher Training, Laura gives a short oral history of how the **"The Union of Sun and Moon Yantra"** came down to us. She shares about Rinpoche as a young boy spending time with his un-

cle Togden, watching him practice in his retreat cave and mimicking some of his movements. How later on he was taught by Adzom Drugpa's son, Drugse Gyurmed Dorje, along with both Changchub Dorje and his son, Gyurmed Gyaltsen, who passed on the oral transmission of the system in its entirety. She shares about the early days learning Yantra from Rinpoche directly, the translation and shaping of the text and commentary, and the systematization of the practice within the community. And she shares about the teacher trainings, the supervision and authorization processes, the Tagthers – everything that Rinpoche, she and Fabio have given to bring us to this point. At the end she speaks about sharing the complete system of Yantra Yoga, all three levels, along with the Kumar Kumari, with Rinpoche in 2016 at what would be the last global gathering of teachers during his lifetime. With tears in her eyes she invites us into the preciousness of that moment – having Rinpoche know that the system in its totality is rooted here with a group of capable stewards.

As the week of training goes on, this theme carries throughout. Our community is in a time of transition. The lineage must be passed on, and those of us who are putting ourselves forward to become teachers should take this responsibility seriously.

Each day greets us with birdsong, tropical flowers, and trips to the sea before sunset. While practicing in the Gömpa, we each do our best. More than forty practitioners from around the world, with vary-

ing levels of experience, training together in the subtleties of breathing and movement. Teachers from around the world join us to support and lead sessions, bringing their unique styles and insights. Over the course of the week we become more and more connected: to one another, to the place, and to the practice.

Doctor Phuntsog joins us to share the Tibetan Medicine perspective, illuminating the balancing nature of specific series of movements for each of the constitutional types, and shedding light on the healing power of Yantra. At one point she too shares with great emotion about the preciousness of our master and the profound nature of the yogic path we have access to.

Many of us are meeting face to face for the first time. Others are reconnecting with old friends and vajra family. Finding our peers in the stream.

Before long, everything culminates, with a full moon Ganapuja and an incredible multi-birthday party. Then we are each on our way back home. But something inside us has changed – we've entrained more deeply to the vajra body of this profound lineage. We've made a commitment to deepen our personal practice and capacity to teach with pure intention. And to honor our proximity to the masters that transmitted this great system to us.

Special thanks to Fabio and Laura for your tireless dedication. And to Max, Alina, Nataly, Marco, Alessandra and all the other teachers who supported us this January. May this lineage continue in a perfect way.©

Reflecting on Merigar East Events

A Journey of Connection and Growth

At the dawn of 2024, Merigar East embarked on a meaningful journey, receiving guidance during a retreat led by Aleksander Skwara, who generously spent the last days of 2023 with us at Merigar East. Leading us into loving-kindness meditation along with the practice of Avalokitesvara Korwa Tongtrug, the retreat took full form, becoming "Healing the heart and bringing peace to the world". Wondering how we did it? Feeling the heart slowly melt, open, and embrace it all with love and awareness, relaxing and smiling. We are grateful to Aleksander for introducing us to this wonderful practice that allows us to access it at any time.



union and practice, as well as cutting down and grooming trees at the gar, the weather

sire to foster connection and growth in our community. Thus, between May 23–30 we invite you to the Big Karma Yoga Gathering to prepare the gar for the summer season. ME awaits all those who seek isolated natural conditions, favorable for many external practices, with circumstances favoring the strong manifestation of the elements.

From June 04–09, Elias Capriles will be our guest for a retreat "Practices for discovering The State of Dzogchen and gaining confidence in it: 21 Semdzins of Dzogchen Upadesha".

20–27 June, when Yeshe Namkhai will be teaching, if you are unable to attend Merigar West, we invite you to Merigar East to watch together online. We also have a wild beach nearby, along which there are a variety of restaurants, (fishermen's huts where they cook freshly caught fish) with good quality food.

If we haven't convinced you yet, perhaps the Guruyoga of White A (Guru Garab Dorje) retreat and Vajra Dance on 10–14 July with Zoltan Cser will be a strong argument for visiting us.

You can enjoy the dry summer air and the famous mud packs, making Merigar East a perfect place for healing the body, not just the soul.

From July 23–27 join us for a course open to all those interested in "The way to understand nature and oneself – A brief insight into Buddhist and Western philosophy" with Oliver Leick and Gabriella Schneider. This experience awaits you at



Following this auspicious start, a few but worthy volunteers actively engaged in the Lungta project. The collective efforts led to a celebration of Losar, empowerment, and hanging Lungta in the gar, symbolizing not just project completion but a shared commitment to spread benefits both within our community and around us. The Tibetan New Year was an occasion of joy, re-

being perfect for this operation. Dedicated volunteers and practitioners worked meticulously and enthusiastically to prepare the trees for the coming season.

Now, as nature undergoes its natural transition – winter retreating, spring awakening – Merigar East is also in its own metamorphosis. This way, the summer program is shaping up with a big de-



our modern guest house, ensuring a comfortable and enriching stay.

For those seeking a more 'unconventional' vacation and prefer to spend a few days in a tent, we also offer a camping space at the gar with a summer kitchen equipped with everything you need.

We will then delve deeper into our personal practice together with Oliver during the retreat, which will take place from 29th July to 4th August, focusing on the Practice of Green Tara. Discovering the awakened stability of our own real nature. It will be the perfect time to taste the fruits of our organic garden and and enjoy the warm water of the Black Sea.

The Merigar East Oasis project, which aims to develop a stable ecosystem, continues to facilitate the cultivation of healthy food and the preparation of organic herbal cosmetics, which you will find at our small dharma shop.

Stay tuned for more information on the upcoming Course on the Vajra Dance and 6 Spaces That Benefit Beings with Elisha Koppensteiner and the retreat with Steven Landsberg, "The Dzogchen Distinction: Path Beyond Words."

With love,
Merigar East



December 2, 2023, Khaitya teleconference with Kunsangar South.

News from Kunsangar North

Dear and beloved friends, joyful greetings to everyone from Kunsangar North. After a long, cold and snowy winter, spring comes to the Gar, and the crowns of the centuries-old pine trees rise into the clear blue sunny sky.

Life at the Gar continues, still working for the benefit of all Rinpoche's students and all guests.

We celebrated the New Year 2024 according to the Western calendar. More than 100 people came to the Gar and we had a lot of fun. We prepared food with our own hands, shared our recipes and the joy of being together.

Some celebrated midnight with a glass of champagne, some by practicing in the Stupa of Perfect Victory, and some traditionally on the Vajra Dance mandala. Then there were many songs, competitions, games, jokes, laughter – the snow sparkled with blue light, the faces of Rinpoche's students sparkled with happiness.

In February we celebrated Losar just as well: joyfully dancing on the mandala, dancing Khaitya, playing the "Liberation" game and organizing mini-retreats with instructors. On the most auspicious days, we hung out the *lungta*, which we had printed ourselves at the Gar on our own equipment.

It is very encouraging that Rinpoche's students have begun to come to the Gar more and more often – to conduct personal retreats, including dark retreats, as well as to independently organize and do practice in the gönpa. Volunteers and karma yogis willingly come to help.



December 7–8, Celebration dedicated to the Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's birthday.



December 9–10, Educational and corrective retreat on the Vajra Dance for the Benefit of All Beings with Tatyana Pronicheva and Ulyana Sokolova via teleconference.

We sincerely thank all the instructors who hold retreats at the Gar, especially the Vajra Dance instructors and the Santi Maha Sangha instructors.

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As always, there is a lot of restoration work going on at the Gar. The most important activity is the major renovation of the administrative building in accordance with regulations from the fire department. We are very grateful to the professional architects from the Community who completed a very complex project doing it as karma yoga. Thanks to their dedicated work, the Community saved a huge amount of money.

In the summer, we plan to restore the walking paths at the Gar, create meditation and relaxation areas throughout the area, and much more.

We thank everyone who cares and is ready to help, and we always invite you and look forward to seeing you at the retreats!

With love,
Kunsangar North Gakyil



December 31-January 2, New Year celebration at Kunsangar North.



January 3-8, Retreat with Viktor Krachkovsky on the 7th Lojong.



February 9, Three-hour continuous practice of the Vajra Dance for the Benefit of All Beings.



4th Khaita Annual Festival, Australia

Carol Albert

A community hall in the small country town of Beerwah, near Namgyalgar, was transformed into a Tibetan community scene for Losar.

A crowd of 80 local residents and tourists were introduced to Khaita songs and dances to celebrate the Wood Dragon year at the fourth Khaita Annual Festival celebrating Tibetan New Year to be held in the area.

The festival, organized by Topgyal and Tsering, is funded by the local government, the Sunshine Coast Council and also supported by Shang Shung Institute of Australia and the Dzogchen Community of Namgyalgar Incorporated.

The festival also included a free introductory session of Yantra Yoga, taught by authorized Yantra instructor Emily Coeling.

Topgyal explained the meaning of Losar and traditional songs and dances besides Khaita songs and how Khaita was initiated by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu.

Topgyal and Tsering and daughter Dekyid and others, both Tibetans and non Tibetans, performed the music, singing and dancing which transported us from the

hot Australian summer to snowy Tibetan mountains.

Meanwhile, dumplings were steaming in the kitchen and the audience then moved out to the shady deck to be introduced to Tibetan food culture with plates of momos.

A New Beginning for Tashigar Norte

Rolo Carrasco

It is with great happiness that we want to share our gratitude to all those who have continued their support for Tashigar Norte. Over the past three months we have had the joy of experiencing again what it is like to have our Vajra family participating in the Gar. We are very grateful to all those who have made this new beginning possible, which allows us to look very optimistically at our future.

A special thank you to Anna Apraksina, Grisha Mokhin, Rita Renzi, Rosemary Friend and Francisca Fuentes for having visited us and restored the joy of sharing a specific Teaching program and making us feel alive again. Thank you Prima Mai for the intention and desire to be with us; we understand the circumstances that prevented your physical coming at the last minute, but you were with us in mind and heart (and by Zoom).

To the visitors, some who came for the first time and others who were reunited with Margarita's particular energy, showing understanding and gratitude due to the operative limitations we have, considering the size of the host team. Thank you for the constant recognition. Thanks to those always there, to those who year after year have remained firm in their commitment



to supporting the Gar, even without having the possibility of enjoying it in person, specially to Fanny, Valter, Massimo and Ralf for your active participation in promoting this relaunch, and to all those who I did not mention but who are much more, infinite gratitude. I am not going to expand much further, and I will let those who have visited us tell you about their experience in recent weeks.

It is proven that the Gar can host events again without setbacks, that there is a feeling of security, a sense of change and better perspectives. Coming to the end of the season, just a few of us will remain, but

with renewed energy and the hope of seeing you all more often and soon.

Since the Gar still does not have resident instructors, it is not possible to develop a program of permanent activities. Until this condition changes, we will work on in-person programs for short seasons. Most likely from December to March. We will certainly try to organize some online programs (another good news is that our internet passed the test) in the interim. We take this opportunity to invite all those instructors of any of the disciplines linked to transmission who wish to come, to contact us. We can offer you free accommodation for now, and depending on how our fundraising activities go, we can contribute with part of their transportation. But for now it is not possible for us to commit to that part.

Right now and until March 5th you will have the opportunity to contribute financially to Tashigar Norte through the online auction on CHNN Evolution Creations. Financially at this moment the Gar has a balance of six thousand dollars in its accounts, enough to get to the middle of the year. But there are general operative expenses to cover and restoration projects to execute according to the following list:

- * General operative expenses . . . US\$ 20,000
- * Restoration and waterproofing of the Gönpa roof US\$ 8,000
- * Partial restoration of the Gönpa floor US\$ 5,000
- * Additional restoration of the Gönpa floor (includes layout of the KDK mandala) US\$ 7,000

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Return from Margarita Island

A bit of history

Rita Renzi

Almost every practitioner who has followed the Master around the world has been to Margarita Island in Venezuela at least once. The Master loved that island off Caracas and considered it a perfect place for him and his students, a place where he could practice his teachings and also relax by swimming in the turquoise waters of its beautiful beaches.

In 2002 the land that later became Tashigar Norte was purchased. Several practitioners have built beautiful homes here integrated into the surrounding landscape. At the top of the land was built the Master's house, which enjoys a view of the entire Gar and also a view toward the sea.

In Tashigar Norte, from the early 2000s until 2013 the Master gave wonderful teachings in which many practitioners participated, coming from all parts of the world. In 2002, examinations to become instructors of Santi Maha Sangha, Yantra Yoga and Vajra Dance were held here



for the first time. In 2002 many received formal initiation into its Longsal teachings, followed by a 2-week long teaching retreat. Margarita has also been an important place for teachings on the Jnana-dakini Gomadevi. In March 2004 for the first time the Master gave instructions for the practice of Gomadevi, and in 2007 the Gomadevi Drubchen was held in the Gar that many will remember. These are just some of the important teachings received

by Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche's students in Tashigar Norte.

In addition to giving wonderful teachings, the Master relaxed by often going to Zaragoza Beach to swim, followed by a large number of practitioners who enjoyed the beautiful sea with him. We would go offshore, swimming slowly, then at a reasonable distance from the shore, sing the Song of the Vajra together, relaxed and suspended between sea and sky. The Master also invented games for us to play in the water, such as the "liberation" or "Shari-putra" game.

Teaching, practice and relaxation have always been the soul of Tashigar Norte, and I believe all the fortunate students who came to the island during those years enjoyed all this richness and abundance.

Unfortunately, in recent years the economic and political situation in Venezuela has plummeted, making it increasingly difficult to travel to Margarita Island. The last time the Master held a retreat in Tashigar Norte was in 2013, and slowly the Gar emptied out and remained silent for a long time. However, amidst many difficulties, it was kept active and functioning as much as possible, thanks to the immense work carried out by the few remaining residents, especially Rolo and Marina who with great dedication and facing the difficulties with fortitude, kept "the fort" for all of us, so that in the future practitioners could return to enjoy this beautiful Gar.

And so it was....

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- * Restoration of dining room beams and water tankUS\$ 1,200
- * Restoration of the bedroom ceilingUS\$ 1,200
- Total estimateUS\$ 42,400

The good news is that an anonymous group of practitioners decided to buy "Casa Diego" in Zaragoza beach for US\$ 40,000, to be paid in 4 years. The house was donated back to the Gakyil to be administered as a special place to visit. It will be restored with funds from the same group of donors, and will be available for visits on special occasions when the Gar hosts activities. So, 10,000 for the current year budget is on its way.

Do your best and participate in the auction to help us to move forward. If you are interested in making a direct contribution, besides the auction, you can write to us at rolocb76@gmail.com

Remember that the Gakyil is responsible for half of Tashigar Norte's general operative expenses. The other half comes from the contribution of the owners of houses and lots within the Gar. The possibility of becoming part of the Village of Tashigar Norte at bargain prices is still open. Visit <https://www.tashigarnorte.org/houses>

Our last two investors, Massimo Catalfo and Ralf Strehle, in fact, already have legal resident status in the country. They followed the recommendations and suggestions we gave them and have been successful in their procedures.

To the digital nomads of the Community and general IDC members who wish to spend a season at the Gar, a favorable and auspicious place for the practice, with all basic services working, 5 minutes from the Caribbean Sea and with a Gönpa always open a few steps from home, write to us. We can make this easily happen.

With great joy and our deepest gratitude,
We are waiting for you.
The Tashigar Norte Family



Rinpoche's bedroom in his house at Tashigar North.

Return to Margarita

Circumstances for an active return to Margarita seemed favorable in 2024, the 20-year anniversary when the Master first gave Gomadevi teaching and practice. The general situation on the Island had improved and a trip no longer seemed so impossible.

Talking with Fanny Santos Landsberg in March 2023 in Tenerife, it was thought that a program with Gomadevi Dance classes and practice might be of interest to several people willing to travel and reconnect with Gar and the Island. And so, as soon as the communication of a draft program was made public, the response was immediately positive and full of enthusiasm.

More people joined in by proposing additional practice meetings. In December and January, Grisha Mokhin and Anna Apraksina held practice retreats and classes on Santi Maha Sangha and Dance. In February, a group of about 25 people in attendance and others online were present to learn the Khalong Dance, connected via zoom with Prima Mai, who unfortunately for health reasons and with great regret was unable to come. Following and in conjunction with Losar until February 24, Gomadevi was practiced in both the long and short versions, supplementing them with the Dance of the Song of the Vajra.

A practice session was then devoted to the Master in his beautiful home, where his presence is still very much alive.

As he taught us, it is also important to relax, and we were spoiled for choice among the different beaches, all beautiful and rather empty. Long beaches to walk, crystal clear sea to swim in. A wonder.

Lunches together, bagchen games and the pleasure of sharing made the stay a real joy.

The experience exceeded expectations, and I think all participants in this "reunion" felt strongly the connection between us. It was a meeting under the banner of harmony and collaboration, a pure Mandala at the center of which the presence of our Master is always strong and current. He is always our center, our inspiration and our guide.

I can only advise everyone to return to the Isla bonita, to our precious Gar, to help as much as possible to keep alive this gem, "Margarita," which I am sure has remained in the hearts of all who have known it. For those who have never been there, a good trip if circumstances permit, is recommended. You will be welcomed with kindness and loving care. Important: there is now very good Internet connection at the Gar, which can be further implemented if needed. For those who live in Tenerife, there is a direct flight to Caracas that leaves once a week from Tenerife North. Other possible flights are from Madrid, Lisbon, Istanbul, Russia and South American countries.

For those who would like to help Gar, there is an auction going on with several pieces of jewelry created by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. Here is the link: <https://www.tashigarnorte.org/category/auctions> ©



Flavia Lepre

These lines are a small tribute to the great richness that my stay at Tashigar Norte has given me.

After more than a decade and many hours of flying, the warm wind that stirs the palm leaves and lifts the dust that softens the contours welcomes me again to Porlamar airport. Recalled by the course for the Dance of Space of the Song of the Vajra and the call of Tashigar Norte, it was easy to fit into the organization of Prima Mai and Rita Renzi, whom I thank so much. Returning together. Behind us the weight of a daily routine burdened by anxieties of war that multiply and grow with their oppressive trail of pain and family concerns.

I enter the wonder of the Gar's suspended but not distracted time, the calm rhythm of the Dance class, alternating with joyous fleeting group sorties to the island's beaches, the sea. The cormorants plunging into the deep. The little restaurants. The little girls selling purses and handbags made from bolivares of various denominations, the suffering of an economy at its lowest ebb. Children playing ball, some of us with them. Together.

Community, practitioners returning together to Tashigar Norte. A non-competitive race of welcoming and sharing, soup for those arriving, farewell dinner for those leaving. Losar at the comedor and the sharing of gifts. Practices. The Master's house.

Different emotions and sensations come and go, as is normal. An intimate confrontation with the self, without drama. The

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beauty of many moments and quiet fullness as a constant. Some thoughts of the past, but without the mist of nostalgia, the images are clear and bright, like the faceted crystal ball that the Gakyil wanted to give us, as well as the careful organization.

On return, that right distance from the everyday that allows one to see and experience it without being overwhelmed by it, without giving in to repetitive automatism. An extra opening in the heart, a glimpse of blue sky and the furious, hot Lent wind of Tashigar.



Marta Lopez Astrain

Tashigar Norte, in Margarita Island, Venezuela has reopened after 10 years". These were the words of Vajra Sister Janina Leon, it sounded like the Lion's roar, a turning of the Wheel of Dharma, it was a call to go there and practice, learn, be present, celebrate Losar, the year of the Wood Dragon with transformation, action, new beginnings, dance with life and let magic happen.

When our teacher talked about "magic" he did it in special ways and I felt with clarity that our teacher's energy was inviting us to join this very auspicious occasion. There is a picture of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu that says: "I am with you in every moment. The question is: Are you aware of it?"

So, I realized I had to do everything possible to attend our teacher's call. The Vajra Dance of Space of the Song of the Vajra, Khalongdorjeikar, was going to be taught in Tashigar Norte with the joyous presence and collaboration of instructors and a group of practitioners. Everything was ready, inner energy moving towards the teachings.

This precious dance is practiced on a Mandala known as Khalong which had to be carefully drawn by a team of practitioners that worked with the circumstances and had it ready for the course, they just made it happen. What a wonderful team! And our Vajra sisters and brothers that stayed all these years at the gar sustaining it and standing there as real warriors with the unconditional help of local people that always respected and cherished our teacher.



In Tashigar Norte the Gönpa is such a powerful place, vibrant and peaceful. We also did the practice of Gomadevi and dance the Song of the Vajra. The Mandala is so inviting you can dance anytime and in this sacred space, reconnect. I am so grateful for the supreme teachings.

I also feel very lucky for this expedition to Margarita Island and experience its beauty. The wind keeps your senses very open. The joy of swimming in the Caribbean remembering how our teacher liked to sing and moved his hands clapping the sea. His presence is everywhere, the five elements always present.

Thanks, from my heart, to Prima Mai, Rita, Rosemary, Marina, Tanya, Rolo, Douglas. Supreme benefits were received through your work, and the collaboration and participation of many other Vajra sisters and brothers.

And, first of all, so infinitely grateful for your Teachings, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. ©

Embodying Tara – Twenty-One Manifestations to Awaken Your Innate Wisdom

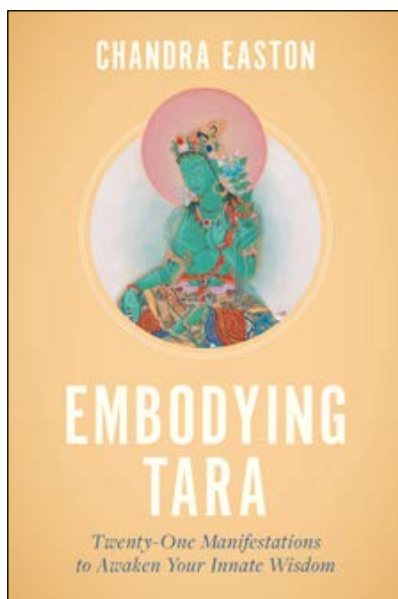
By Chandra Easton
Shambhala Publications 2023
pp. 330
ISBN 9781645471141

Alex Studholme

Quite frankly, I am amazed by how political this book is. Donald Trump gets it in the neck in the first few pages, representative of “the renewal of autocracies, extremism, and white supremacy” in the world. Chandra Easton, a senior teacher at the Tara Mandala centre of the American lama Tsultrim Allione, makes no bones about which side of the political divide she occupies. “It is not enough to sit on our meditation cushions and pray,” she writes, “We should also find ways to put our prayers into action.” To this end, her exploration of the 21 Taras becomes a left-liberal feminist call to arms, embracing the climate activist Greta Thunberg, Black Lives Matter and Me Too. Is this really wise?

First, the more conventional stuff. Easton has done her academic research. In successive chapters on each of the 21 Taras, their names (both Sanskrit and Tibetan), iconography, verses of praise and action mantras are all put under the microscope. Following the same scheme of the 21 Taras that Chogyal Namkhai Norbu taught – the system originally devised by the 18th century tertön Jigme Lingpa – there is plenty here that can happily be embraced by members of the Dzogchen Community to enrich our understanding of the goddess. Easton does a fine job in harmonizing these disparate elements to bring to life 21 well-defined Taras, each with a distinctive character – not an easy task to achieve.

I would have been glad to read more of this material. I enjoyed learning, for instance, how the 21 Taras syncretize certain Hindu deities into the Buddhist fold and how some of these Taras are worshipped in their own right throughout Buddhist Asia. Or that the image of the goddess pounding the earth with her feet, a feature common to several of the Taras, is a metaphor in Vajrayana for ironing out the wrinkles



in our minds. But Easton has other ideas – many other ideas. She is not writing a mere monograph, but a wide-ranging handbook of Buddhist theory and practice that revolves around the 21 Taras.

Thus, there are digressions on topics such as the Eightfold Noble Path, and the Ten Virtuous and Non-Virtuous Actions. Every chapter ends with instructions on the visualization and recitation of the action mantra of each Tara. Easton is a thoughtful and energetic teacher, always looking for ways to bring her material to life. She has a bright, conversational style. “Tears are medicine that arises from the raw energy of an emotion like anger or jealousy,” she writes. Or, more demotically: “We need to spend some time with our AOC: ass on cushion.” She advocates the practice of a kind of imaginative journeying with individual Taras. And to help enter the dimension of Tara Shabari, the “medicine Tara” who is clothed in medicinal leaves, she recommends a return to nature: “Go camping, rent a cabin in the woods... soak in rose-petaled baths, roll around on the leaf-strewn ground.”

Her main innovation, though, which takes up a good chunk of each chapter, is to present brief biographical sketches of women that “embody” the different Taras: as she puts it, “real-life examples of the Taras that bring them into a modern perspective.” Many of these are not overtly political figures: scientists such as Vandana Shiva, who campaigned against genetically modified crops; healers such as Annie Dodge Wauneka, a native American elder; philanthropists such as the media star Oprah Winfrey; artists like the Tibetan

singer Ani Choying Drolma; and spiritual teachers, such as the Hindu guru Amma and Lama Tsultrim Allione herself.

But gradually, the established tropes of the left-liberal orthodoxy emerge and coalesce. The first Tara, Tara Turavira (the “swift”), for example, is embodied by the black heroine Harriet Tubman, who guided many slaves to freedom during the American Civil War. The eighth Tara, Tara Aparajita (or “invincible”), is illustrated by the life of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the second woman and first Jewish woman to serve on the US Supreme Court, celebrated for her advocacy of gender equality and women’s rights. Ethnic diversity is prioritized over representation of whites: of the 24 women chosen here to personify Tara, seven are white, while Easton, herself white, studiously “checks” her own “privilege” and urges her readers to do likewise.

Having embarked on this course, she cannot stop. Some of these connections seem tenuous and forced: Greta Thunberg is presented as the embodiment of Tara Mangalārtha (who “brings about auspiciousness”) and Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani campaigner for girls’ education, Tara Vidyamantra Bala Prashamani (who “destroys the power of evil spells”). And occasionally, Easton even abandons the premise of finding specific people to exemplify the Taras: the seventeenth and nineteenth Taras come to be identified not with actual individuals, but with the generalized political agendas of, respectively, the Black Lives Matter and the Me Too movements.

The amount of political content included here in a teaching on Vajrayana Buddhism is highly unusual – I would say, in my experience, unprecedented. Lamas that I am familiar with always present the Dharma in an apolitical and non-partisan fashion, presumably because they know that expressing political opinions can have an inflammatory and divisive effect on their students, alienating them and acting as an obstacle to their appreciation of the Dharma. No doubt Easton is right in saying that we should put our prayers into action, but I am not sure that it is the role of a Dharma teacher to be quite so directive.

It is not a question of whether or not one agrees with Easton’s views. Even people on the same page as her might feel uneasy about the way she has turned the 21 Taras into a vehicle for her own personal political preferences, not to mention a little queasy about having to digest some rather

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Enemies and Friends

Elio Guarisco

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*May all beings be endowed with happiness
and its cause,
May all beings be free from suffering and
its cause,
May all beings be endowed with happiness
which is devoid of suffering,
May all beings be in a state of equanimity
beyond attachment for friends and hatred
for enemies.*

These four lines express the so-called four immeasurable thoughts or Brahmaviharas of love, compassion, joy and equanimity respectively, which are the base of the conduct in Mahayana Buddhism. The behavior of a Dzogchen practitioner should also somehow reflect such conduct.

However, our attitudes are often the opposite of these immeasurable thoughts. Instead of wishing happiness for others, we wish their disgrace; instead of feeling compassion for the suffering of others, we think they deserve it; instead of feeling joy at the happiness of others, we feel jealousy; instead of treating all others as the same, we discriminate among superior and lower.

Especially, the way we relate with others is opposite to the impartiality implied in immeasurable equanimity. Based on a sense of a separate self, we begin to distinguish others into three categories: friends, enemies and people whose existence and



vicissitudes we ignore. Friends are very important to us – we see that children start to look for friends at a very young age. It is natural that we have a different relationship with people we have known for a long time, we often meet and live with. It would be unnatural if it were not so. Yet to invest in an exaggerated way on friends and those we like will eventually lead to our excluding those whom we don't consider friends from our life.

For friends we are ready to do everything, we are also ready to lie, to steal and sometimes even to kill. Thus, friends may even become the cause for perpetuation of our negative karma at times. In extreme cases we also commit suicide for our beloved friends when we lose them or when they leave us of their own will.

deeper values and truths that they have in common. By aligning herself so unambiguously with one side of the west's culture wars, Easton seems to be shutting down that possibility rather than opening it up. Imagine a Tibetan lama with conservative views on abortion – there are some – who, using the same pedagogical device, illustrates the compassion of Tara with the example of Gianna Beretta Molla, an Italian woman made a saint by the Catholic Church in 1994, who died in childbirth while knowing from an early stage in her pregnancy that carrying her baby to full term was very likely to kill her. Would that be helpful? ©

We spend a lot of our energy and time taking care of relationships with friends as if such relationships were very important. We spend a lot of our time socializing with them, without realizing that in that way friends take away from us the opportunity of using our life in a meaningful way. Slowly our life fades away and our friends also abandon us.

We consider friends and dear ones as someone that has been and will always be in such a role, but we forget that friendship is a relationship that builds up simply because some secondary causes and circumstances in life come together. These secondary causes and circumstances are always subject to change and sometimes they can completely turn around the type of relationship we have with others. Not only that, life circumstances can cause separation from friends. For example, when we change the place where we live or our job, we separate from our friends and eventually we forget about them, or we remember them only seldom or meet with them only once every several years.

Friends can turn into enemies as well. This is not uncommon. For example, a dear friend may become an enemy when we fall involuntarily in love with his girlfriend, or when we become a threat to his or her economical security, or when we become a psychological threat for him. There are so many circumstances that can turn friends into enemies, and not over a long time, but suddenly in a matter of days, hours and even minutes. When this happens, the

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er preachy political sermons in the course of a book about a much-loved Tibetan deity. Personally, I am no great fan of Donald Trump, but I must confess my heart sank when I read Easton's uncompromising denunciation of him. It seems so confrontational, particularly towards those people who may sincerely have had good reasons to vote for Trump and are also interested in Buddhism.

In a society as polarized as the United States, Dharma teachers can provide a valuable service by creating a space where people can temporarily set aside their political differences and focus instead on

person we loved so much, the person of whom we were ready to ignore his or her shortcomings and defects, the person who appeared so nice to us, turns into an ugly person that we cannot stand anymore.

For example, when we love someone, at first the excitement of the relationship makes us accept everything about that person, good and bad. Later, with the passing of time, when the relationship becomes difficult, we start to see only faults in him or her and in the end we are not able to live with that person any more. We separate and when that happens the nice friend tries to take away everything from us - money, house, even pet dogs we owned together. The scene turns utterly ugly.

Speaking about such relationships, Milarepa said, "At the beginning our wife seems like an angel, later she starts to look at us with a corner of her eyes in a mood of reproach and in the end she becomes a devil". This could be said of our husband as well. And that is how our cherished relationships come to an end.

Instead of having such exaggerated attachment to friends, we should be more relaxed in such relationships. To be more relaxed does not mean that we are not loyal to the relationship, or that our ways of relating to our friends are erratic and unstable, that we are faltering. To be in that way would also be an expression of our egoism. But it means to see relationships with friends within the whole context of our life, weighing up what is of definitive importance to us and what is not.

When we have friends, it goes without saying that we have enemies. Having enemies is also a type of relationship with others that many people like to cultivate. When others do not share our same opinions, our same political party, our same social milieu, then they are seen as different, as not belonging to the circle of people we love and care for. People who are different from us are enemies. We consider someone as an enemy on the basis of certain momentary circumstances of our life. Once that person did something bad to us, or to our friends and now we cannot accept them.

Although enemies seem so real that at times we would like to erase them from the face of the earth, in truth enemies can change into friends very quickly, more quickly than we could ever expect. For example, if in time of need an enemy opens his or her mind to us, showing us kindness or a good gesture, that person can immedi-

ately become a very close friend and the old motive of our animosity is soon forgotten.

Moreover for a spiritual practitioner, enemies are not always negative, because in confronting them, we can see the mechanism of our mind, our own limitations, that maybe we would not be able to see otherwise. Confronting enemies one can observe how stable one's spiritual practice is. That is why sometimes in the spiritual teachings it is said that to find an enemy is like finding a treasure. So enemies at times can be much more valuable than friends. Then why do we not cherish enemies as we cherish friends?

Much more important than the relationship with friends and enemies is the relationship with spiritual companions. Any other kind of relationship ends as we leave this world but the relationship with spiritual companions continues till one achieves realization. But who are the spiritual companions?

First of all we should recognize that all humanity and all beings are one's spiritual companions. In fact, when speaking of spiritual companions Jnanapada, an amazing Indian siddha, who was the forefather of one of the two most famous lineages of the transmission of the Guhyasamaja Tantra, said that all sentient beings are one's spiritual companions since they all have non-dual awareness innate in themselves.

Also Lilavajra, another important siddha, said that all sentient beings are one's spiritual companions because they are none other than the manifestation of one's own innate non-dual awareness and are thus not to be regarded as "others". In all of them the essence of enlightenment is present and so they are the buddhas of the future.

Manjusriyashas, one of the Kings of Shambhala, when speaking about six kinds of spiritual companions also places them among them all sentient beings as they all have the nature of Vajrasatta, that is, the nature of the primordial state.

Thus by spiritual companions we should not just think of a closed circle of people. All beings that exist in our dimension or universe have to be considered as general spiritual companions, towards whom we have the commitment to work for their awakening.

Naturally, spiritual companions become closer and more important as they are close to the spiritual path one follows, and the closest are those who share the same vajra master, that is, the master who intro-

duced one to one's real and authentic nature. The relationship with these is most delicate. Spiritual followers often have great consideration and respect for their teacher and they do not hesitate to make sacrifices and large donations to the teacher. But when it comes to their close spiritual companions, they do not have the same consideration and respect. On the contrary, they often criticize their fellow practitioners, attributing them with faults and misdeeds of every sort. Instead of collaborating with them, they enter into competition. That is our ordinary attitude based on our ego.

Recognizing close spiritual practitioners as one's indispensable aid on the path to realization, without considering some to be inferior and others superior, we should train in having a pure and sacred view toward them. A pure and sacred view means that we see them in a positive way, we recognize that they are buddhas, maybe with still some obscurations but nonetheless buddhas and appreciate them as sacred as any other aspect of life.

Revealing to them the knowledge one has acquired from the quest for spiritual realization, one makes them all intimate friends towards whom there is neither attachment nor aversion. This relationship based on understanding, openness, and mutual collaboration appears to be one of the most meaningful relationships we can have in our short life. ©

Jacqueline Gens

Naljorma Tsultrim Allione

Dear Dharma sister Jacqueline Gens left this dimension 1/1/24. She was a real Dakini, insightful, fearlessly frank, and creatively challenging. She always gave me insights and we could talk at a deep level and had a genuine clarity.

We met in the early 80s when she was Allen Ginsberg's assistant in Boulder and I was traveling through Boulder while living in Italy. She was studying with Trungpa Rinpoche and then Gelek Rinpoche following Allen's example. Because Allen and I were in frequent contact so were Jacqueline and I.

We got to know each other better when I moved to New York in 1986 and she was there with Allen. She came to some of my teachings at the Open Center and then I encouraged her to meet Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. She became a committed student of his and also studied with me, particularly Simhamukha and Chöd. We put together practice packets for the Dzogchen community and organized retreats around NYC. She was also writing poetry.

After Allen died she moved back to Vermont where she'd lived at the Packers Corner commune and lived in that area the rest of her life and in western Massachusetts. She was active in both the poetry world and the Dzogchen Community at Tsegylgar. She tried to move to Tara Mandala a few years ago but couldn't handle the altitude. While dealing with that, in the local hospital they discovered she had cancer, which was fortunate because it was in the early stages. She went back to Shelburne Falls and got Senior Housing which was affordable.

She went deeper and deeper into practice and very recently, early last summer, contacted me because she was having dreams of Yeshe Tsogyal. She requested the Ösel Nyingtig practice so I gave her Ngondro and Yeshe Tsogyal Sadhana in a private teaching because I knew she would appreciate it and she didn't have much time left. She deeply understood the profundity of the Ösel Nyingtig cycle and vowed to do it. She died with the text next to her bed



Jacqueline Gens (right) with brother Jesse in 2023.
Photo by Peter Hale



Jacqueline as a young woman circa 1970.



Jacqueline and Alan Ginsberg circa 1991 NYC.

and told her caregiver she was going to do that next. She was confident about death and felt ready to go.

Her passing was reported to be luminous and as she requested, I did phowa for her when I heard she'd passed. I'm feeling the loss of her presence in the world as are many old and newer friends. She was special, unique and a real Dakini. ©

Jacqueline Gens passed away on Monday, January 1, 2024 in Northampton MA, USA. She was a former editor of *The Mirror* and a major contributor.



Jacqueline at her base level Santi Maha Sangha in Conway, October 30, 1994.
Courtesy of Jim Valby

For the Wood Dragon Year

– and in memory of Jacqueline Gens

Peter Fortunato

All Good, we say: Samantabhadra is the All Good, unborn, unending, unlimited, and so I celebrate this Losar, the Wood Dragon Year first of all by remembering what we practice, although it's without you, dear Jacqueline, to inspire us. The Wood Dragon: strength, wisdom, good fortune. Abundance, prosperity, happiness—what more could we hope for, we transmigrating souls, we streams of consciousness who imagine that we're born and die? Ah, but the friend I knew is gone; Ah, but I who have the power of speech am compelled in your absence, in my grief, to remember how many times for past Losars you shared your words to celebrate what is nothing other than the turning of a wheel within a wheel, and our practice to celebrate the ineffable. This year, it's the dragon, exalted symbol of the Natural Mind, who this time around, aligns with the wood element, nurturing and fruitful. So then, might we recall how rare it is to have been born human—so then, I must also recall your departure on January 1, 2024, and settle myself with the facts of impermanence and the uncontrived mind. Losar Tashi Delek!

In Remembrance of Federico Ballarin

Clara Lovisetti

Federico was a special person. And I am not saying this because I was his partner, for a little over a month also his wife. So many things could be written about him, both as a practitioner and as a man, about what he had done in life and was recounting in an autobiography that he did not get a chance to finish.

He was constantly in search of knowledge, taking an interest in many disciplines, at times a little bizarre, until he encountered Buddhism and then Dzogchen.

One of his passions was music, which he not only listened to but loved to play. As an admirer of John Coltrane he had even thought of becoming a saxophonist. Our house is dotted here and there with musical instruments, a keyboard, a saxophone, flutes of all kinds, Tibetan trumpets disassembled above the bookcase, a guitar, bongos... As a young man he used to paint, which a few years ago for a short time, he had taken up again. And then soccer - he was a Juventus fan and a fan in general of the sport, in which he was well versed.



made me pick olives. He took me to India, a country he loved very much, and to Tibet. He opened my eyes to many things, both mundane and related to practice. He brought me out of many limitations, like the Master told us to do.

Aside from Rinpoche and the Teaching, first and foremost were his three sons Fla-



Rinpoche getting on Federico's bike at Merigar.
Photo by Karin Koppensteiner

We met in January 2011, ours was love at first sight you could say. Since then we lived as if in symbiosis, him returning to Venice after years in Rome where he had a privileged working position, me abandoning my comfortable life in Milan.

He made me love the mountains in the summer and cross-country skiing, but he did not succeed with soccer. He

vio, Emiliano and Rahul and his two beloved grandsons John and Leandro, as he used to repeat while jokingly pretending to forget about me. He was a somewhat henpecked companion and father who cared about everything and did not skimp on advice, sometimes getting upset if it was not immediately accepted or, heaven forbid, rejected.

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Federico often spoke to me about his relationship with Rinpoche, who was for him not only his root teacher but also the father he lost when he was only four years old. A relationship built during walks the two of them took alone, such as those in the Finnish wilderness on retreat breaks. Federico had even taken Rinpoche on rides on his motorcycle, as seen in a photo of the Master sitting in the saddle that ended up on the cover of a poetry book. He fondly remembered those moments of intimacy and confidence when the Community consisted of a few dozen people and the Master was always close to his students.

In fact, Federico can be said to have been one of those who contributed materially to building Merigar. For example, together with Bepi Goia and a Tibetan monk he built the small stupa near the Yellow House, even placing one of his gold rings among the precious things placed in its foundation.

He was among the participants in the pilgrimage to Kailash, a journey plagued by obstacles and intemperance of various kinds, which had greatly scarred him, causing him to withdraw from the Community for a time.

By the early 2000s, I believe, he had held the position of Yellow Gakyil of the Ling in Rome, the city where he lived for almost ten years. He also did his best to raise awareness of Tibetan culture, organizing with ASIA in 2010, also in Rome, the event *Sguardi sul Tibet*, a series of meetings with various cultural figures, held in the Capitoline Halls.

He was always keen to take the opportunity to benefit weaker sentient beings, such as animals. For example, on walks in the mountains we used to feed ants – you know those huge ant hills you encounter in the woods – with sugar or authenticated bread-crumbs, something he had learned from Rinpoche during a retreat in California.

And when Rinpoche left us it was a blow to him; he lacked the spiritual guide from whom he could seek advice and confide his progress. Indeed, Federico was a great proponent of personal retreats, particularly those in the dark. That is why he never failed, at every Merigar membership meeting he attended, to plead the cause of retreat cabins.

He felt the end was near and he wanted to prepare himself, he said, which is why in recent years in the summer he found time for a dark retreat, the longest of which was forty-nine days. Even last year he was



Anna and Babette.

Anna Eid

Babette Eid

ready to try his hand at a week, only to desist on the first day because his physical condition did not allow it.

In the 1990s Frederick had experienced the remission of a throat tumor, which had been resolved thanks to a therapy learned from the Japanese Zen master Inohue Muhen, as recounted in his book *La terapia del soffio*.

But here again was the disease, this time in another part of the body, lurking in him. It had begun to seriously worsen a year or so ago, in March, giving him in the following months the illusion of improvement only to worsen more and more following a fall in November, until its final conclusion in late February after months of great suffering.

Federico was an edgy, contentious person at times, with a fighting spirit who detested bullies. But then his generous soul would come out, capable of giving and expressing so much love as he gave to me, to his children and grandchildren, to the companions before me, to his friends, to the Tibetan children he sponsored through ASIA... That love that his Master had passed on to him.

When The Mirror asked me to write something about my mother Anna, I remembered that I had recorded some of our conversations, including one in which she told me how she came to Merigar.

"I was sitting in the garden at a friend's house in Germany and suddenly heard sing-

.....
Goodbye Federico, you will always live in my heart.

Clara



Federico passed away on February 25, 2024

My Dad Federico, the Best

Rahul Ballarin

My father was practically the "best" for me. When Rinpoche would say, "If you have any doubts about this practice, you can talk to someone who is an expert," I knew I could count on him, and those chats are already among the things I miss the most. My father was often an impulsive person and this may have often given the wrong impression of him to those who didn't know him well, but the love he always showed toward us children and grandchildren and the love he showed toward the Teaching are the greatest example and gift he could have given me. ©

ing out of the window, which really inspired me. I asked my friend where the music was coming from. She said it was an audio cassette that someone had given her, she couldn't remember where, but it was definitely something Tibetan. Then I said: I absolutely have to know about this music. The cassette had been recorded at a conference for Tibetan culture in Venice and somehow we learned that this cassette came from Arcidosso in Italy. That was all we knew.

We went to Arcidosso. We had no idea about Merigar and it was very difficult to find it. We both hardly knew any Italian. Then somehow a woman in the field shouted "Tibetani!" and pointed to an old car driven by a Frenchman, Patrice Bricaire. I followed him along a very bumpy road and we arrived at the Yellow House.

It was total chaos everywhere. There was no electricity, no water, it was very primitive. We spent the night there on the dirt floor in the room where the office is today. There were also beds there, but there was no more room. In the morning I heard the singing. This was in the summer.

The next winter I went on a retreat in a barn where the Luce Sorgente hotel is today. There was a big wood stove in the center of the room. I found Merigar through music and immediately felt at home.

My second retreat in 1984, trekking in Nepal, was completely different. I had never traveled alone before. I tried to contact Nancy Simmons to ask where the group was meeting in Kathmandu and went from hotel to hotel in Kathmandu asking when a group from Italy was expected there. I asked a lot of hotels but nobody could tell me anything until I came to the Vajra Hotel. And they said, yes, a group from Italy is coming tomorrow.

The next day the Italian group arrived. I was a bit shy, I didn't know anyone, and it was quite difficult. I talked with a French woman, Germaine, and then shared a tent with a Canadian girl. 35 days of trekking. Rinpoche was in a small group on horses with his sisters in front of us. It really was an incredible experience back then, away from civilization, completely alone. There was Tolu Gönpa, very wild and high and lonely, where Rinpoche gave teachings. At that time he was still teaching in Italian. From there we went to the second stop in Maratika where I heard the Song of the Vajra again."

I took my mother to the airport. It was clear to me that she was leaving, that she

had to go her own way, I knew it was necessary. But I was 23 and I thought it should be the other way around and I had no idea where she was going.

A few months later, I visited Anna on her next retreat in Loches, France and saw Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche for the first time. There were live peacocks sitting behind him during the teachings.

In 1985, I visited her at Merigar. I had the fortune to be able to accompany her on her "Dzogchen path" for 40 years, during which Merigar/ Arcidosso became a second home for me.

In these forty years, there was only one place where she lived twice. The first time I visited her, I came to a place which was half a ruin. The main room was still usable. We cooked in the open fireplace, we had candlelight and water was only available from a spring. I can't remember if and where there were still doors or windows

After H.H. the Dalai Lama had inaugurated the Gönpa, Anna moved to Gadeling for the second time, to the place where I had visited her in the ruins. The house had been beautifully renovated and the Namkhai family asked Anna to support them there. She was fortunate enough to live there with the family for several years and I was also allowed to visit her and stay with them.

I have fond memories of the evenings with Rosa and Rinpoche in the living room. There was always something to watch and listen to, even at the dinner table, and often someone came to visit. Besides, you could learn so much from Rinpoche and Rosa.

My mother often told me how happy she was. In the conversation I recorded, she said: "In the first years of the teachings, I didn't understand anything". I think that changed during her time at the house with the Namkhai family. She often said later, "I have had a wonderful life".

Anna Eid and her daughter Babette.



and where we slept. It may have been possible to get to the second floor via a staircase that was no longer completely safe.

Many other places of residence (Bagnore, Santa Fiora, Arcidosso, San Lorenzo) followed, all had their charm: Santa Fiora and the Peschiera, San Lorenzo and the fairytale chestnut forest.

She also lived in Merigar 2, the house where Migmar now lives with his family. At that time there was the Tibetan "pharmacy" there. I remember when the Tibetan doctor, Menpa Phuntsog Wangmo, also lived there. Patients used to come during the day and in the evenings Phuntsog and I would get mattresses out onto the terrace in front of the entrance. We would tell each other stories from our very different lives and sleep under the starry sky.

After her time at Gadeling, Anna "looked after" Namkhai Norbu's house at Tashigar Norte in Venezuela for three years to support him during his stays there.

She found her "own" place below Monte Labbro six years ago. Today I am sitting here writing about her, for her, for those who did not know Merigar 40 years ago. Here on Monte Labbro, she found peace on the property of Bruno and Marisa. Although they are not members of the Community, they attended the ceremony for Anna in the Cinerarium at Merigar and found this place so peaceful that they would like to go there, too. ©

On Tuesday, 23 January, 2024, Anna Eid passed away peacefully in the Amiata area close to Merigar.

How I Met Chögyal Namkhai Norbu

Lobsang Zatul

During our last visit to Dzamling Gar, Adriano Clemente reminded me to write an article for The Mirror on how I met Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. I felt obliged and honored to follow this advice.

I was born on the 4th day of the sixth month in the Earth Rat year of the lunar calendar, the 4th of June 1948 in the Western calendar, in a place called Chödzhong near Rongbuk monastery at the foot of Mt. Everest. My parents moved from Lhasa to this remote place due the birth of my elder brother who was recognized as the reincarnation of Zatul Rinpoche, the founder of Rongbuk monastery. My mother's parents were from Kham and had migrated to Lhasa as traders. My father's family was from Nyethang near Lhasa which is associated with the Buddhist scholar, Atisha and the Tara temple. Atisha was from Bengal, India, and taught in Tibet for 13 years. Nyethang Drolma Lhakhang was his residence where he died in 1054. This temple is also famous for the 21 Tara statues in it which are said to have survived the mass destruction during the cultural revolution.

My birth place, Chödzhong, was the residence of our family while my brother was staying in Rongbuk monastery where he received his formal monastic education. Once a while, I also stayed in Rongbuk not only to keep my brother company but I also received my first education in reading and writing Tibetan there.

The monastery follows the Nyingmapa tradition and its founder was called Zatul Rinpoche. When my brother moved to Switzerland before the family, he said that his family name was "Zatul", so after that all of our family members took this surname. However, when I write Tibetan, I don't feel very comfortable with my name because of this "tul", which means "incarnation".

My family escaped Tibet in 1959 due to the Chinese invasion. I was eleven years old. After getting a tip from a family friend that the Chinese were on the way to arrest my brother and my father, who had been appointed as the administrator of this monastery by the Tibetan government, we had to leave our home in a hurry.



Lobsang and his wife Kelsang at Dzamling Gar.

In some way we were very fortunate because at that time my brother was by chance in Chödzhong, otherwise he might have gone to prison. And then when we left, we also had a second piece of good fortune because we met the yaks that belonged to the monastery. The yak herders told us to take them with us because at the border to Nepal we had to cross a very high icy pass which we couldn't do with the horses, only with the yaks. And then, happily, up to the border to the Himalayas, we took the horses and the yaks, and from there we left the horses behind and went on with the yaks.

But even at that time we still didn't know what had happened in Lhasa. We thought we would escape and after some months we would be able to come back.

In Nepal we arrived at Naboche, a small town in Solukhumbu, the place where mountaineers first come for expeditions to Mount Everest. The Nepalese soldiers who were stationed there told us that they had heard on the radio that there had been a revolt in Lhasa and that the Dalai Lama had had to leave for India. From that moment on we knew that we could not go back to Tibet any more.

In Nepal we stayed for a time at Tengboche monastery, which had a very close relationship with Rongbuk monastery, and then continued to India, to Dharamsala.

We lived in India until 1963. My brother was able to join a special training for young lamas and my two sisters attended the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts. I was sent to a Tibetan school in Mussoorie. Our parents had a hard time making a living during this time.

Luckily, in May 1963 we arrived at Zürich airport among the second group of Tibetan refugees to be settled in Switzerland. The following years, more Tibetans settled in Switzerland. We now have a tight knit community of over 7000 Tibetans in Switzerland where we could pass on our identity to the young generation.

I was 15 when we arrived in Switzerland. I went to school there and eventually did commercial studies and worked about 10 years for a Swiss Bank, after which I changed to export import. So actually I had a normal Swiss life, nothing spiritual or a profession connected to Tibetan culture.

While I was working, I met many young Tibetans who were interested in the Tibetan language and I started teaching Tibetan to them. This was also good for me because while I was teaching, I also became interested in learning Tibetan. I was fortunate because the husband of my older sister was also a high reincarnated lama and I was able to learn a lot from him.

I first met Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche in Switzerland around 1971 at our home in a place called Ebnet-Kappel. Rinpoche came with his son, Yeshe, who was a baby, to visit Trijang Rinpoche, the tutor of the Dalai Lama, our guest at the time. What fascinated me was that Rinpoche changed the baby's diapers. Seeing a high lama doing something so ordinary like taking care of his baby personally left a great impression on me.

I was one of the founding members of the Tibetan Youth Congress in Europe. In April 1975, we invited Rinpoche to give a lecture on Tibetan history during the annual meeting of the Tibetan Youth Association in Europe. Rinpoche introduced his new book "*The Necklace of Dzi (gzi yi phreng ba)*" which he wrote for that occasion in Tibetan as a gift for us young Tibetans.

Rinpoche was a highly respected scholar both in and outside Tibet. Owing to his many years of traditional training in Tibet combined with his experience in modern research methodology in the West, Rinpoche acquired a deep knowledge of Tibetan history.

In that book, Rinpoche traces back his country's history nearly 4000 years and refutes the almost accepted theory which



L to r. My mother, myself, my brother and sister on our arrival in Zürich airport on May 1st, 1963.

reduced Tibetan civilization to the emergence of Buddhism in Tibet 1300 years ago. Rinpoche also rejects the account that Tibetans had no writing system before the reign of King Songtsen Gampo (d. 649). He considered that the Zhang Zhung Kingdom possessed a writing system that had developed long before the reign of King Songtsen Gampo.

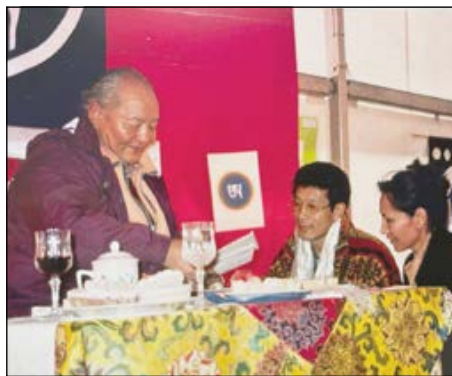
The book was first published in Tibetan by the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, in 1981. Noting the importance of this work for a wider readership, it was later translated into English and published by the Office of Information and International Relations, Dharamsala.

At the end of the event, Rinpoche said: "If any of you want to come, I live in Naples and you're welcome to visit me."

The following year, a friend of mine and I went to visit him in Naples. There, we met Rosa and their children, Yeshe and Yuchen. What I can remember is that young Yeshe was doing the Nine Purification Breathings in the morning and that impressed me a lot.

Rinpoche once took us to the countryside. We went to a vineyard where he bought a very big bottle of wine, a *fiasco* in Italian, and said, "Before you both leave, we have to finish this."

Rinpoche was good at cooking, too. The Momos (Tibetan dumplings) he used to make were delicious. We would sit in the kitchen and drink wine while he was giving us teachings in an absolutely informal way. It was one of the happiest moments in my life.



During our stay in Naples, Rinpoche encouraged us to connect more with Tibetan culture. Once he wrote down the hundred syllable mantra for me and I promised to learn it before I left Naples. On the last day of our stay, I managed to recite the mantras by heart in front of Rinpoche.

We learnt from Rinpoche that he was doing the *Tra* divination. Since we were young bachelors at the time, we wanted to know whether we would get married. After doing the necessary ritual for the *Tra*, he consulted the mirror. For me, he saw three objects: a photo that looked like the Mona Lisa in a frame, a bridge and some flowers at one end of the bridge. And for my friend, he saw two dice with identical numbers 2 on them.

Traditionally, each one interprets the meaning of the *Tra* for oneself. At that time, neither of us could say what the meaning was.

Time passed by but I was always thinking about the divination. Then, a few years later, I met Kelsang, my future wife. While

applying for her entry visa to Switzerland, Kelsang sent me her passport photo which I interpreted to be the Mona Lisa in the frame.

One day, my sister said that the bridge might refer to the ocean which was separating Kelsang and me at the time. That sounded quite reasonable. One morning, I had an experience between dream and reality which made it clear to me that the flowers on the other side of the bridge referred to the name of my wife: Kelsang Dolma resp. Kelsang Metog and Dolma Metog. I was convinced that this must be the meaning of the flowers Rinpoche saw in the *Tra* divination and it meant that I would marry a person with the name of flowers.

In 1987, we were invited by an American family to visit them in Florida. At their place, I saw by chance a magazine that mentioned Rinpoche's book *The Crystal and the Way of Light*. I showed my interest in the book to our host who then ordered the book for me without my knowledge. What a surprise and joy! But, I had to read it a few times to get a glimpse of Dzogchen teaching. However, my interest started growing about Dzogchen.

In early 1990, again during a meeting of the Tibetan Youth Congress in Switzerland, I read an article about Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche who would be giving a teaching on Dzogchen in Kandersteg, Switzerland. The retreat was organized by our late Christina von Geispitzheim who was living in Zermatt, Switzerland at that time. At my request, she arranged an extra teaching session for a group of Tibetans before the actual retreat started. Kelsang and I joined the group of Tibetans together with my mother-in-law who was a Dzogchen practitioner. We all felt so blessed to receive such a wonderful teaching from Rinpoche. Personally, I was so fascinated by Rinpoche's presence and his words that I decided to stay on for the whole retreat. Christina later told me that she had never seen Rinpoche so happy and content after his teaching for the Tibetans.

When I heard the Song of the Vajra for the first time in my life in the presence of Rinpoche, I knew that I had found my Root Guru. E MA HO!

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