

Geshe Dennyi Shedrup: We go to the mountains and practice the generosity of healing

written by Jitka Polanská



Geshe Dennyi Shedrup is the director of the Triten Norbutse's Medical Institute (School of Four Medical Science of Early Tradition) in Kathmandu and an experienced practitioner of traditional Tibetan medicine. In the summer of 2022, he visited Shenten Dargye Ling for the first time and taught Westerners about *Lung* (wind) energy. Soon after, Geshe la and his students went to the Himalayas, to collect medical plants and practice *man-jin*...

Were there doctors of Tibetan medicine in your family, Geshe la?

My uncle is an *amchi*. I am not sure if he is fully qualified in all the four sciences of Tibetan medicine, but he does help people with their health issues. Being a nomad, he stays in the countryside for long periods and knows medicinal plants and their healing effects. When I was a child, together we collected various herbs and plants and I learned from him how to distinguish them. We spent lots of time together and were very close. My uncle also gave me some basic education, he taught me how to read...

Later, you continued your studies in a monastery?

I entered a monastery when I was sixteen years old. At the beginning, I focused on the preliminary practices, ngondro, I learned some traditional rituals and also learned and practiced *tummo*. In 1992, I was a part of a group of monks who went to India to pursue studies at the Dialectic school of Menri monastery – *shedra*. Tibetan medicine is a part of the curriculum of *shedra*. Besides that, I received teaching of medical science from His Holiness the 33rd Menri Trizin. He taught just me and another monk, my friend. Looking back to it now, I think that maybe he already saw that *sowa rigpa*,

the science of healing, was in my future, that I was going to become a medical doctor. I cherish that memory of him teaching us, it was very special.



Geshe Dennyi with Tulku Ponse Yigme Tenzin and students of the School of Four Medical Science of Early Tradition, during the festivities at Triten Norbutse, in January 2020.

Which path took you finally to lead the medical school of Triten Norbutse monastery?

During my studies I went to Triten Norbutse in Nepal to receive some Dzogchen teachings from Yongdzin Rinpoche. I completed my studies and received my geshe degree there, as well as furtherly deepened my knowledge of Tibetan medical science with Geshe Kunsang Gyaltsen.

As a geshe, I started teaching grammar and poetry at the medical school of the monastery. In 2012, the head of the medical school, Amchi Tsultrim Sangye passed away and Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche appointed me to take his place.

How are the studies at the school structured?

Some students come from families which hold a lineage of *amchis*, doctors of traditional medicine, in Dolpo, Mustang and Humla, the mountainous regions of Nepal. Some of them did not have an opportunity to complete a higher education and they also come in different age, some at twelve, others at seventeen. We teach them therefore not only medical science including the history, but also Tibetan language, Tibetan astrology and subjects of general education like biology or chemistry.

After a five-year medical course and passing exams the students obtain the degree of *Kachupa*, which can be compared to a bachelor's level of education. It takes up to ten years though to become a *Menrampa*, a fully qualified doctor of Tibetan traditional medicine.

From the study Medicinal Plants of Dolpo: Amchi's Knowledge and Conservation

"Amchis usually begin their studies when they are in their early teens. They learn to identify the medicinal plants of the highlands in the summer and of the lowlands in the winter. They begin to treat patients after four to five years of study and practice."

"In the modern world, people choose the medical profession for a variety of reasons, ranging from the motivation to serve others to that of gaining fame and prestige. The most important motivating factor for an amchi should be the desire to benefit other beings and to relieve them from the suffering of disease. The amchis-in-training are constantly reminded of the six qualities (gyu duk) of intelligence, kindness, trustworthiness, practical experience, diligence and social awareness that they are expected to possess."

How many students are currently studying at the school?

Around thirty students, at different levels.

I noticed there are many girls among them. Why is it so, do you know?

Yes, more than half are female students. Well, nowadays, in many schools, even at the universities, girls outnumber boys. And we have the same situation in our school. There is a general tendency and interest of girls to study. Young people may look for an education and choose traditional medicine because they see it can bring benefit to people and to society. Also, some parents think about what profession could be good for their children and come to see the school, and when they like it, they send a son or a daughter to be enrolled.

What do the graduates of the school do, after completing their studies?

As much as we can, we support them to go to the mountains and help people there. There is a lack of medical care in the Himalayas and their work is very beneficial for the local communities. Some go there for a period of time, while others return to their native villages and remain permanently.

Even before becoming *amchis*, students and teachers of the school go every year for three months – from August to October – into the high mountains of Dolpo or Mustang. We spend weeks in high altitudes, sometimes even at 5000 meters above the sea level. It is a part of the regular school's program.

Teachers and students together collect medical plants and offer medical help for free to the villagers. It is called *man-jin*, the generosity of medicine.



Where do you sleep, in the mountains? In tents?

There are not enough tents for everyone. We stay in caves, or under an overhang of a large rock or in shepherds' shelters.







Collecting medicinal plants in the high mountains, cooking in the countryside, sleeping in shepherds' shelters...

From the study Medicinal Plants of Dolpo: Amchi's Knowledge and Conservation

"Although harvesting periods of medicinal plants differ with species, amchis generally follow specific cultural or religious processes prior to harvesting. Inauspicious period for harvesting pasture resources, in general, is determined in advance by the head lama of the area based upon the Tibetan calendar and medical texts. Amchis usually propitiate the menlha or medicine deity prior to collecting the plants. Moreover, fodder grass as well as medicinal plants from the pasture, particularly whose underground parts are used, are harvested during a specific auspicious period known as dangsong rikhi. It is a period of seven days determined by the head lama according to the Tibetan calendar when most of the perennial herbs complete their life cycle during September/October. During this period, 'nutritional showers' are said to occur which enriches medicinal plants including grasses, and thus increases their medicinal efficacy."

Your medical institute serves also as a clinic. Who are the people who seek help from you? Do they all belong to the Bon tradition?

Not really, besides Bonpos also Nepali and Buddhists come. Usually they are people from remote areas of the Himalayas. They know about us from other villagers to whom we helped during our trips

to the mountains.

How many patients do you have in average, in a day?

Around 10 - 15.

Do they have to pay for your service?

Yes, but compared to other clinics in Kathmandu we are cheaper.

Are students of the school allowed to deal with patients?

Yes, our senior students, supervised by teachers, can examine them and in this way, they master their knowledge.



Geshe Dennyi and his student Karma Drolma, at Triten Norbutse in Kathmandu. Drolma is a student of the medical school and helped with the communication in English when the interview was finalized.

What do you think about Western medicine, Geshe la?

I always tell my students: you have to learn traditional Tibetan medicine, but you also have to learn Western medicine, both are very important. Western medical doctors know many things that traditional Tibetan doctors do not know, and there is some traditional medical knowledge that can enrich the practice of western medicine.

We invite medical doctors trained in Western medicine to the school and share our mutual knowledge. Students from senior classes also attend lectures and seminars of some scientific subjects at the university.

From the study Medicinal Plants of Dolpo: Amchi's Knowledge and Conservation

“After collection, the plant parts are washed properly, and then dried either in sun or in

shade, depending upon the type of disease for which the plants are used. The plants used to treat cold diseases (dangwa) are dried directly in sunlight, whereas the plants used to treat hot diseases (tsawa) are dried in shade. Besides these two categories, for other uses, the herbs are dried both in sunlight as well as in shade. The herbs are stored in leather or cloth bags and wooden boxes.”

Do you have any general advice for people on how to keep healthy?

A healthy body and healthy mind are connected. Meditators think that with the power of their mind they can make their bodies healthy. Traditional medical practitioners believe, on the contrary, that if the body is healthy, the mind will be healthy too. Both points of view make sense. Anyway, meditation is very good to keep a person healthy. I heard about many cases of people who improved their health by meditating regularly.



Geshe Dennyi at Shenten Dargye Ling, in the summer of 2022.

I heard an *amchi* saying that too many thoughts can bring health problems. In the West, we do not believe that if we think too much it can affect our health.

There is a connection between a *lung* – a wind energy – and thoughts. There are four main categories of diseases, they can be connected with wind, bile, phlegm and a combination of these three. One of the diagnostic methods is examining the pulse of a person. The pulse can reveal the state of the mind of the patient, a doctor can feel when there is an imbalance caused by the wind –

lung.

From the study *Medicinal Plants of Dolpo: Amchi's Knowledge and Conservation*

“The most important diagnosis is to identify whether the nature of a disease is ‘hot’ (tsa) or ‘cold’ (dang) because an amchi may do more harm than good if he cannot differentiate between the two. When examining patients, the amchis of Dolpo employ the techniques of seeing, touching and questioning to diagnose an illness. Seeing involves examining the tongue, eyes, complexion, and urine. Touching Involves feeling the pulse and areas where pain is felt by the patient. Questioning involves asking the patient the causes and nature of the illness. Byskillfully utilizing these three techniques, an amchi is usually able to diagnose an illness without sophisticated equipment. But as amchis have repeatedly pointed out, in the absence of a skillful integration of the three techniques, an illness can also be misdiagnosed if one merely “fingers the pulse and stirs the urine.”

You gave a teaching to the Western public about the *lung* at Shenten Dargye Ling, last summer. What was exactly the subject of your seminar?

I gave a basic introduction to *sowa rigpa*, the traditional science of healing, and to the principal corpus of medical texts called *Bum Zhi*. Then, I focused on explaining how to harmonize the *lung* – wind energy – in our organism.

You can read the study Medicinal Plants of Dolpo: Amchi's Knowledge and Conservation [HERE](#).

Pictures: Geshe Dennyi, Jitka Polanská

We thank Khenpo Gelek Jinpa for translating the conversation with Geshe Dennyi and to Karma Drolma for assisting with the check of the interview.

Teachers and students of Triten Norbutse's medical school on a trip, 2022. Source: Triten Norbutse

Anne: We published the “Heart Drops” in Finnish and think what will come next

written by Jitka Polanská



One of the fundamental texts in Yungdrung Bon, the Heart Drops of Dharmakaya, was translated in Finnish and published by Anne Brunila and her friends. Anne does not speak Tibetan and the only option that she saw was to translate the text from English. Then, she received a suggestion from Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche...

Five or six years ago we asked Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche to start teaching us the Heart Drops of Dharmakaya in Finland, and he has been doing so since. I asked specifically for this text, after having read the book of Yongdzin Rinpoche with this name, which is basically his exposition of Shardza's text that he gave in a teaching. It had a big impact on me. I thought that having a teaching in Finland based on this text would be wonderful. Khenpo Gelek Jinpa had been teaching us from Gyalway Chatri for quite some years and so I thought that the Finnish sangha was ready to receive the teaching contained in Sharzda Rinpoche's book.

There was another nexus leading in that direction. When we established the formal association of our sangha in Finland, we asked Yongdzin Rinpoche to give it a name. It took some time before I got a piece of paper from him. Khenchen Rinpoche handed it to me, I opened it and the name written there was Dechen Ritro, the name of Shardza Rinpoche's retreat place in Tibet!

We had not had any text of Yungdrung Bon translated in our language, except for Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche's books. It seemed to me worth investing my energy into translating Shardza's book. Again, I asked Khenpo Rinpoche what he thought about it. My idea was to translate Yongdzin Rinpoche's book which is written in English, because I cannot translate from Tibetan, but Khenpo la asked me: "Why don't you use Philip Cornu's translation into French?"

I agreed but I did not want to give up translating Yongdzin Rinpoche's book as well. Sharzda's text is beautiful, poetic, symbolic, full of metaphors, but it uses expressions of which it might be hard to grasp the meaning if you did not receive an explanation on it before. I thought that people would understand it better if they had a possibility to read Yongdzin Rinpoche's book first, because it contains lots of commentaries.

And we did this way, together with my friend who is also a long-time practitioner. My French is good, but hers is perfect, she is bilingual. Each of us came with own translation and then we compared them sentence by sentence, to get the most accurate final version. She brought in her linguistic excellency, I contributed with some insight into the teaching. We needed to consult some parts of the text with Khen Rinpoche, of course, because even if we understood the French, sometimes we did not get the meaning. He kindly met us on zoom, and we went through all the unclear parts.

Besides that, I translated Yongdzin Rinpoche's book as well. This I did very fast - in one month. The text was very engaging and inspiring, I could not detach from it from the morning till the evening, it absorbed me. The whole project (including the translation from French) took a couple of months.



Shardza Tashi Gyaltsen

DHARMAKAYAN SYDÄNOLEMUS

DZOGCHEN MEDITAATION YDINHARJOITUKSET

Toimittanut Anne Brunila

The Finnish edition of Heart Drops contains therefore both translations, but it is not too thick, it has two hundred thirty pages. Although some publishers who are specialized in Buddhist and spiritual literature were interested in it and would release it happily, I decided to publish it myself, starting a small publishing company for that purpose. The book went out in December of 2021. It is for sale in several bookshops and also online bookshops in Finland. We also set up our own e-shop where the book can be bought.

And I am already thinking, what would be our next titles. For sure I will prepare to print the transcripts of Khenpo Tenpa Rinpoche's teaching of the Heart Drops, but that would be in English. I think it can benefit many more people in that way. When we organized his teaching online, in 2021, there was more than four hundred people attending.

Pictures: Jitka Polanská, Anne Brunila

Geshe Samten Tsukphud: We wish Melong Yeshe have qualities of mirror-like wisdom

written by Jitka Polanská



Geshe Samten Tsukphud is tightly connected with Shenten Dargye Ling. He stays there for

long periods of time during the year and is a member of the managing body of Shenten's Congregation. He is also the chief editor of Melong Yeshe, an online magazine in Tibetan language reporting mainly on events and activities taking place at Triten Norbutse Monastery but publishing also complex texts about various topics of the teachings of Yungdrung Bon.

When did you start the magazine and what is its content about, geshe la?

It was in 2015. Yongdzin Rinpoche and Khenpo Rinpoche blessed it with a small ceremony, lighting a butter lamp as a symbol of wisdom to be spread everywhere.

I was thinking about a name and finally decided for *Melong Yeshe*. It means mirror-like wisdom, it is a concept important in the religious context, as one of the five principal wisdoms. A mirror can reflect our face and all things that we put in front of it; similarly, we want to reflect all events and activities that are happening in the monastery throughout the year: rituals, ceremonies, examinations...

Who else besides you is involved?

Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche and Ponlop Tsangpa Tenzin Rinpoche are members of the editorial board of the magazine. My best friend, geshe Woser Gyaltsen who lives in Germany, created the website for it, in wordpress, and he became its webmaster. Before that, I started something on a smaller scale, it was a kind of blog, and I was helped with that by Tom, one of Rinpoche's students from Hungary. I used it for one year and then I switched to the current site which is supported by my friend, who also pays for the domain and all the service costs. Also, some friends from the monastery help me to get information and photos. And I have a friend, Khritsuk Tenpa, who is a teacher at the school in Siliguri, the school founded by Khenpo Rinpoche for the children from the Himalayas. He sends me information and pictures and we publish texts about the school too.

How many articles have you published?

Around seven hundred. Some texts like news are easier and do not take much time, but we also publish biographies, articles about history, or research of ancient texts. Those articles take quite a long time to write. But we always try to keep texts as short as possible, for internet reading it is better to keep it brief. We also have a section where we answer questions from our readers.

Who are your readers?

Different people, mainly Tibetans, monks and lay people too. Anybody who is interested in Yungdrung Bon and can also read Tibetan. Mostly they are Tibetans who live in Nepal, but also in Tibet.



Melong Yeshe's home page

Your activities as an editor are larger than that. For example, you were involved in the new edition of Kangyur, the complete canonical collection of Bon texts, published in China, right?

Yes, I helped with it. At Triten Norbutse I work in the monastery's library and I have connections with other scholarly oriented Bonpo monks outside the monastery, and also in Tibet. One of them invited me to be a part of the project of publishing the new Kangyur. It was mainly editorial work. Before, I had worked with them on publishing Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche's collected works and so we got to know and trust each other.

You are one of the resident lamas of Shenten, geshe la, and you stay there for large periods of the year. When did you come to Europe for the first time?

It was in 2002, twenty years ago. Yongdzin Rinpoche was very sick at that time and he came to France to get medical help. Khenpo Rinpoche and I accompanied him to a hospital in Paris. He stayed there for one week and then we went to Normandy, to Lord Lowel Guinness's place where Rinpoche was staying for around one month, recovering. Fortunately, he felt better and started traveling again to different places in the West, giving teaching. We stayed in Europe around three months at that time with him. After that, I came almost every year, again together with Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche and Yongdzin Rinpoche.

Do you remember your first impression from this continent?

Yes, I remember that the Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris impressed me, so big and nice and full of things. It was so huge that I could not understand how to get out of it (he laughs). But Jean-Luis Massoubre, a student of Rinpoche, was waiting for us and helped us. He organized everything. When we went to the streets of Paris, I was very surprised, I was wondering how all those huge, historical buildings could be made, in ancient times, by humans (he laughs). The city looked very big, compared to Kathmandu. Which is big too, but it is different from western cities with large roads and high buildings.

In 2005 Shenten Dargye Ling was established. Did you come to stay at the very beginning?

I went to visit Shenten before it was purchased but I was not there in the first period. I do not remember when I started staying regularly, maybe from 2006. I went to Shenten more and more and stayed for four, five, six months, and sometimes even in the winter when Yongdzin Rinpoche left for Kathmandu and when only a very few people were at Shenten. One year I remember I was here almost alone for a whole month. It was a bit scary (he laughs).



Geshe Samten at Shenten Dargye Ling, summer 2022

What do you like about Shenten?

Conditions are very good here, especially for meditation, the best place for meditation, I would say. No noise from the neighborhood, then there is a SuperU, the large supermarket, very close, you can get whatever you need very easily.

Can you share with others about what effect of the practice you feel personally?

Yes, we do lots of practice at Shenten, especially the practices of Four generositys, but also lots of meditation. All this leads the mind to be more peaceful and to release attachments. Fortunately, a monk's life is very simple, I have no business to take care of, so my attachments are not very strong (he laughs). We have heard so many times that life is short and illusory, changing and impermanent, nothing is trustable in the condition of the relative truth. But hearing it is not enough, we need to integrate this view within our life. This is what I keep in my mind and try to do all the time.

You give teachings to western students, sometimes at Shenten, also in Germany, jointly with Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche. You might teach more but it looks like there is a linguistic barrier...

Yes, my English is not good. I did not get an opportunity to learn other languages when I was a child, only my native tongue. That's why my English is so poor. When I got my geshe degree I was already an adult and not so flexible to learn a foreign language. It is not easy for me. I learned it to some degree, but it is difficult to make it better. I have attended language courses in England and also in the US, in Los Angeles, but I have not progressed much. Especially in the US it seemed to me that it was not very effective, we had little chance to practice the language, so I did not continue. Anyway, I can speak and I understand other people when they speak. I learned most by listening to Yongdzin Rinpoche's and Khenpo Rinpoche's teaching in English and being with them when they speak with others.

[མེ་ལོང་ཡེ་ཤེ།](#)

Melong Yeshe

Photos: Jitka Polanska