Anna, the onsite manager: We threw ourselves into work

written by Jitka Polanská

Anna Dziatko came to Shenten Dargye Ling in August 2020, directly from Kathmandu where she was stuck for six month due to the pandemic. In January 2021, she officially took on the position of onsite manager of Shenten Dargye Ling. What does she do, day by day?

What is a typical day of the onsite manager at Shenten Dargye Ling?

I usually wake up around six thirty every morning. After breakfast, I open the office to check and answer emails, but sometimes I can only manage during the weekends. In the mornings I often work in the chateau, as there is always something to do; cleaning, and arranging things. Sometimes I go out for the shopping, other times I help in the garden. In short, I do whatever is needed for general maintenance of the centre, which comprises many unexpected things, as when something gets broken and we need to fix it. The biggest problem of this kind was when our machines for cutting grass broke, first the big one and then the small one too. It was a small crisis. We have managed till now with the small one which we repaired and also a neighbor helps us, but I think we need to invest in a professional mower very soon.

Back to my regular duties. I also take care of people who are in the dark retreat. When our cook,

Marilyn, is not here, I cook for them. I also welcome our many visitors, and as a member of the board of the Congregation, I participate in many tasks of the administration of Shenten.

From September to November, you were also assisting the participants of the Gomdra. It is a 4 year intensive meditation course that lasts 70 days each year. Your daily routine must have been a bit different in that period, didn't it?

Gomdra was the first important event on the Shenten site since I took on my current position. It was a true challenge for me. We finished all the preparations just a week before people arrived. Then, I worked in the kitchen in the morning, helping the cook to prepare, did the shopping, did laundry and was available for whatever were the needs of the participants. I was very busy, from the morning to the evening.

On the outside, Shenten keeps the look of a typical French chateau, but inside, it takes on the aspect of a Tibetan monastery, with typically red doors, yellow walls and blue ceilings. Lots of painting of has been done, lately, hasn´t it?

Yes, and I think that the new colors have given the rooms some warmth. Originally, we thought to paint only one side of the wing of the castle and leave the other side for the following year, but once we started, the energy and enthusiasm of the crew led by Khenpo Gelek were great and we could not stop, so we went on and on. Now, only one room is left to be finished; the rest are completed. We have also painted almost all the rooms in the Pavilion. A new office of the Congregation was also created.. We also completed the office of the Association, next to the entrance to the chateau. As many people know, Shenten is managed by these two entities, which are, as Khenpo Gelek says, two bodies with one heart. In addition we also created a new room for Khenchen Rinpoche who moved from his former house to the lamas´s wing of the Chateau. We also replaced the lights of the corridors and in the bathrooms with LED neon ones with the timer. A new handicap access ramp was also built at the entrance of the chateau.

I see lots of furniture that was not here before… How did you get it?

Some people from the neighborhood donated quality furniture in massive wood and we found out that we can find more of it at an affordable price. The taste of French people has changed, and many do not want to keep classical furniture in their houses anymore. You can now find a bedside table in wood and marble for five euro and sometimes even less!

You arrived to Shenten directly from Kathmandu. Hundreds of westerners traveled there for the ceremonies in the monastery which took place in January and February in 2020. However, you stayed until August, and without planning it, right?

Yes, I arrived on January 7th and I was scheduled to leave March 13th. But I could not. My flight was from New Delhi in India. However, they closed the borders for French citizens that day and I could not board any plane from Kathmandu to India. Three days later Nepal also closed its borders and one week later they ordered a lockdown. Two weeks later we knew that we could leave with a charter flight organized by the Nepali government, but it was quite expensive. Since I did not have to really hurry, I decided to stay and wait. And I stayed until the August 29th. Actually, it was a wonderful period of my life. I was allowed to stay in the monastery guesthouse and I spent all my time there or in the monastery. I could not go to the city and the monastery had isolated itself. I took my food in the guesthouse and sometimes in the monastery. Once or twice a week we, a tiny group of people who stayed, received a teaching from Khenchen Tenpa Yundgrung Rinpoche. I also helped in the garden of the medical school of the monastery. Along with five young girls, students of the school, I went there every day around twelve o' clock for four months. I learned Tibetan, I assisted in the monastery rituals, and did lots of meditation. With one Tibetan nun, we met together for meditation every morning and every evening on the guesthouse roof.

Anna, how did you met Yungdrung Bon tradition and when did you come to Shenten for the first time?

I lived in Guadaloupe before, with my two children. I came to the island when I was nineteen years old. I have always been sensitive to my spiritual side, but I did not belong to any specific tradition.

Then, five years ago I had an inner experience which brought me to look for Yungdrung Bon. A word was repeatedly coming to my mind which I did not know, but I found out later that it was the name of the founder of this spiritual tradition, Tonpa Shenrab. I was searching on the internet, but I did not find anything at first, then I tried to spell it in a different ways and that time I got closer. Searching again I found Yongdzin Rinpoche´s photo and I felt a strong connection, but when I saw he was in Nepal, I gave up, and did not think I could travel that far. However, these feelings remained within me and I started to search again to see if perhaps there were teachers of Yongdzin Rinpoche´s tradition in France. I came across a web site where Bonpo lamas teaching in the west were listed. I contacted Geshe Lhundup from Paris, it was in 2017. In 2018 in May I came in Paris and I met him. Later I heard from him about the upcoming ceremony of DUTRISU being held at Shenten in the autumn of the year. I went for the first time to Shenten for this event. Some days later I took refuge with Yongdzin Rinpoche, on the day of the anniversary of parinirvana of Buddha Tonpa Shenrab.

> Do you to know who is in the teams administrating Shenten Dargye Ling? You will find their names HERE.