

Aurore: I did not think I could find the precious teaching of Dzogchen in my country

written by Jitka Polanská



Aurore Lombard is French, and has pursued a spiritual path since a teenager, but she did not know of the existence of Shenten Dargye Ling until 2017. She met Yongdzin Rinpoche in Nepal. “In him, I had found my root master, finally, someone who would offer me the high, precious teachings and instructions of Dzogchen, after many years of searching,” she says.

You live in Bali, Aurore. How did it happen?

I have mostly lived outside of France, since the age of eighteen, for both studies and work. I am a marine biologist by education and profession, specialized in pearls, and it was my job that brought me to Bali, about fifteen years ago. I started working in Thailand in this field twenty five years ago. I was twenty-four years old. Then, after five years I went to Tahiti for work, always in the pearls, and stayed there for five years. Then, I went to Bali and the place has kept me longer, already for fifteen years. When we arrived there, my daughter was five years old. We live here with her and my husband. Now I am not working anymore and dedicate my time to practice and dharma, trying to make pearls of wisdom.

What is the spiritual culture of people in Bali like?

The majority of Balinese join the Hindu religion although it is more a kind of syncretism between Buddhism and Hinduism, mixed with the local ancestral traditions. People of Bali see the world vertically structured in three dimensions. The highest is the abode of gods, the lowest is the home of *nagas*, and in between there is the human realm who is supposed to keep the balance between the two.

Balinese live with invisible beings of the natural world, always trying to establish harmonious coexistence with them, similarly to what traditionally Tibetans do. Every rock, every tree, every river is inhabited by a spirit and people pay them respect, make offerings to them. You can find small shrines and temples in many places in nature, beside a river, for example, you will find a small shrine where you can put some flowers and incense in order to ask for permission to share the place for a while or use the water.

Balinese religion is also known to be the religion of consecrated water. They use mantric water in all ceremonies and believe in its power of purification and healing. They make many offerings to nature and the universe on special days, actually they live with the moon. Offerings are made of natural ingredients such as fruits, flowers, leaves, nuts and water. Each item has a spiritual significance and symbolism. Usually, women are in charge of preparing the offerings. Each family has a small temple in their home for the ancestors, they also make offerings daily to the gods, the protectors and the demons.

You focus on spiritual practice in your life. When did you start developing an interest in spirituality?

Already as a little child. I was born in France, but France always seemed to me a bit sterile, as for religion and spirituality, lacking the right balance between the material and spiritual, between the brain and the heart.

My grandmother was different though. She had lots of faith and she was my hero. She had a very generous heart, lots of love, many spiritual qualities, always praying for all family members. She was a role model for me.

When I was a teenager I started traveling to India. As soon as I touched its ground with my foot, I felt at home. I felt the energy of spirituality was still there. And that is where I met Tibetan Buddhism. It was a discovery that there was something meaningful in life, something higher and beyond the material aspect.

Where exactly did you meet with Tibetan Buddhism?

I went to Dharamsala instinctively knowing that I would be able to see His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama of Tibet there. Already in France, during my childhood, I had enjoyed following news about him and collecting pictures of him in magazines.

In Dharamsala I attended a course called 'Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism' which literally changed my life. After that I continued to travel to India and Nepal every year whenever I had vacation from my job, to attend teachings and do retreats. This gave me good foundations in bodhicitta and emptiness. Teachings on compassion really deeply touched me. I thought at that time that I could not find anything higher, better, or more beautiful than this in the whole planet.

However, deeper inside I was searching for Dzogchen. The way of meditation which I had encountered during my journeys was very conceptual and didn't really suit me, as I realized.



Aurore with Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche during the “summer retreat” in 2022.

So I traveled everywhere searching for a qualified master. I loved reading Dilgo Kyentse Rinpoche, Dudjom Rinpoche and Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche’s teachings, and Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche.

One day I heard about meditation in the dark and I wanted to spend some time in a dark retreat. At some point, someone told me that among Bonpos it is very common to do dark retreats. It was the first time that I heard this word: Bonpo. By that time I also read some books by Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche and went to meet him in Virginia. There, I started to follow his cycle of teachings on Zhang Zhung Nyen Gyud. It was in 2014.

But then I felt I needed something more conservative. I went to Menri monastery in India, and after that, to Triten Norbutse, in Nepal. For some reason, in my mind there was a conviction that I could not find authentic teaching anywhere in the West, neither in the US nor in Europe. Strangely enough, I did not know about the existence of Shenten Dargye Ling in France even though I am French.

How did you know, finally?

From Yongdzin Rinpoche, whom I met in his monastery, at Triten Norbutse, and not in France, even though he used to spend many months each year in my country. I would never have imagined that such high teachings and such a high precious master would be there in France all that time.

When I saw him for the first time, he started to speak some words in French with me, saying *Bonjour, ca va...* I had a strong feeling that my prayers were finally fulfilled, they had brought me to the one who was going to offer me the highest, most precious teachings and instructions of

Dzogchen, after all those years of searching in the whole world.

During this first encounter, Yongdzin Rinpoche advised me to go for teachings at Shenten and I did. I took refuge there with him when he last traveled to Europe, in 2018. Since then, I now follow the Yungdrung Bon tradition of Dzogchen under the guidance of Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche, Khenpo Gelek Jinpa and other lamas who teach at Shenten.

Pictures: Aurore Lombard, Jitka Polanská