The training of an opera singer helps me in translation, says Marc

written by Jitka Polanská



Marc has spent most of his adult life with Bon and many people see him translating teaching at Shenten Dargye Ling. "I put my heart in it, trying to keep people inspired with all means at my disposal," he says.

Marc, when did you come to Shenten for the first time?

I think it was in 2006. I was not there in 2005 for the first retreat after opening the center, but I went to retreats with Yongdzin Rinpoche in Vimoutiers and Paris before. I met Rinpoche in the autumn in 2001 in Paris, during a weekend teaching. I remember it was extremely cold and I also remember a very clear, blue sky above Paris. I had been already involved in Buddhism and Dzogchen, but mainly in the Nyingma tradition. My first contact with an actual Tibetan Lama was with Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche.

The filmmaker?

Yes. I attended a general / public talk he gave in Paris. Then the first "traditional" teaching that I received was from HH Sakya Trizin, the head of the Sakya school, then I studied with Sogyal Rinpoche who had his center, Rigpa, in Paris. The translator of Yongdzin Rinpoche at that time,

François Calmès, who was also active at Rigpa, spoke very highly about Rinpoche and this brought me to Bon.

Quite some time ago…

I am forty-two now so yes, half of my life has passed since then. There was somebody new who came for the teaching last summer and he was somewhat "impressed" by how long my friend and I had been following the teachings, but, to speak the truth, we were actually a bit ashamed that we were still so ordinary after so long ! *(laughing*). But it depends on the perspective from which you look at it. I can see benefits of the teaching on myself, definitely.

Could you be specific about the benefits?

I used to be melancholic. Sad. There is a famous poem "The rose is without why; it blooms because it blooms, It pays no attention to itself, asks not whether it is seen" – and so was my sadness, I felt it without any obvious / tangible reason. From one point of view, everything was just fine and yet, there was a "blanket" of sadness which made my life not enjoyable. It hindered me in my actions, blocked my initiative. Everything required lots of effort to be done, or at least this is how I felt. The teaching and the practice helped me a lot in dispelling this obstacle. Now I am much more at ease and at peace. Life flows more easily. Nothing very profound or mystical, I would say, but my life has improved. I attribute it to the effect of the teaching even if, in part, of course, it could also be just maturing from what is a mindset of a young person. But I know people who are getting melancholic with aging and I think the teaching saved me from that tendency. I can feel I am on the right track.



Marc at Shenten Dargye Ling in the summer of 2023

Do you remember your first impressions of Shenten and its community?

Yes, it felt simple and relaxed, compared to other Tibetan Buddhist communities that I knew, somehow heavier and more strict. There was a kind of atmosphere of ease. Of course, nothing is ideal, there were problems too, people sometimes argued, but in general, it was more informal and simpler. It was also smaller, which does play a role. The community counted one hundred, one hundred twenty people, maybe, which meant we could have a better access to the teachers, and this felt priceless, especially coming from other sanghas, which were much bigger.

You seem to me to be quite familiar with the Tibetan language. Since some time you have been translating teachings at Shenten and I noticed that you can easily catch key words in Tibetan…

Yes, I did three years of Tibetan studies at the university, as a young man, more or less contemporarily with my engagement in the opera singing. My professional life has been quite diverse and changed its course several times.

When and where you trained as an opera singer?

In the conservatory in Paris, the period was 1999 – 2006 . There I also started an embryo of a beginning of a career but then I stopped. Too much pressure, and also I felt as if my butt was sitting on two chairs, as we French say. The other chair was my aspiration to dive deeply into my practice. I was even attracted to monkhood. I was torn apart with those two contrasting inclinations: a passion for music and longing for a spiritual life, on the other hand. And the fact is that I have never gone one hundred percent in one or the other direction. I mean, I became a singer and the beginnings looked promising, but I did not give myself to it fully and completely, because it felt somehow pointless. I could not go “all in”, as they say in poker. Opera singing is a highly competitive thing – you cannot be there without engaging fully. It can be very stressful too, so at some point I stopped, it was in 2009.

Did you continue your studies of Tibetan language and culture?

I did not complete the course and, therefore, obviously, did not obtain the bachelor’s degree. I somehow could not see myself in academia. So it happened that I have no university degree; although the diploma I received from the conservatory is highly respected within the fields of music and dance, it is not equivalent to a university degree.. And when I stopped doing music, it was a little complicated because, from an academic point of view, all I have is my high school diploma.

I am curious to know what happened then.

I have always been interested in human science, and studied economics as an autodidact.So I decided that I would try to get work in finance. Without a proper diploma it was not that easy, but I managed my way through. My entry point was through sales. I was calling people and offering them investments, but I really did not like that. Luckily, I managed to move into the advisory field and worked as a wealth manager, for people who are well off. Not only did I enjoy it much more, but I could also apply what I learned in the arts. When done properly it can be a holistic job, not just about finance: you take into account the family situation, personal objectives, preferences… Also, the quality of the relationship matters a lot. I did this for four years and stopped when I divorced.

From whom?

I was married to a musician. I was young when we met, and she was even younger. After I

interrupted my musical career, I looked for jobs which could provide for both of us, and from that point of view, finance looked like a good choice. When I divorced, there was only one mouth to feed, and this granted me more freedom. And I moved back to music. First, as a piano and singing teacher for children, and then going back on stage; not in classical music anymore, instead, I performed a "jazzy" repertoire in five star holiday resorts in Bali and Mauritius where I grew up. Later on, I had the opportunity to get back to classical music, especially operettas.

In Bali you met your current wife, right?

Yes, I met Mandana there and we married after seven years of being together, in 2022. . At the time, I was only traveling in Bali, and she was already living there. I moved there a few months after we met, and started working in Bali. It went quite well for a few years, until covid erupted. As tourism came to a complete halt then, I lost all my contracts in entertainment. Everything was frozen. Anyway, at the time, I was actually already planning to stop working in the resorts and move back to classical music. It would have been tough, but not impossible. I would have aimed at singing in some smaller, provincial opera houses. With covid, I got more immediate preoccupations: I was left without any financial means. As a freelancer I did not get any compensation, neither from a company nor from the government. But I was very lucky to have my family. We stayed with my parents in Mauritius for quite a period.

You developed a new profession during the pandemic, as far as I know.

Yes, the situation was not a joke, but I took that challenge as an opportunity. I had a roof above my head, at my mum´s place, and so I dived into studying computer science, by myself, from scratch. There is actually lots of amazing material online, made by prestigious universities, most of them for free. I managed to be disciplined enough to create a personal curriculum and follow it.

What kind of job did it bring to you?

Now I work as a data scientist, in the field of machine learning and AI. I work for a startup in Mauritius. In order to generate some cash flow while we develop our core product, we do some "data consulting" on the side: creating data pipelines and doing some analytics and data mining as we call it. But the core project is to develop what is known as a "Recommender System" powered by AI, which would help small retailers to boost their business, by telling their customers what other people with similar profiles bought. This is how a big part of sales on Amazon works. I do like the job, but I would like to reach an area where I really can make a difference, using data and AI to do something more socially useful, maybe to help fight cancer or global warming.

Or fighting artificial intelligence, no? Isn´t it threatening to make many people lose their jobs and bringing other big dangers?

No, I think we that should not fight it, but rather find ways to work with it, leverage it. Otherwise, I would not do that job… So, that´s where I am now. I have finally a job that I can do from anywhere as I have always wished. But I am paid in Mauritius rupees now which is not the strongest currency in the world, and this come with its limitations. My goal is gaining enough expertise to become a consultant, working on my own, and be able to live in nature, maybe in the mountains, working a few months a year and dedicating the rest of my time to practice. Leading a very simple life, with the luxury of free time, in natural surroundings conducive to practice.

Your English is so good. Is it due to the opera singing?

Probably. Languages are a form of music, I guess. I have been exposed to many languages when

studying classical signing. Also, Mauritius is a former British colony. An average Mauritian person speaks much better English than the average French person.

I cannot detect a French accent.

I can speak with a French accent if you want. I can do it (*imitating it*).

At some point you have become one of the translators for the teachings organized by Shenten Dargye Ling. In particular, you translate Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche´s teaching. Do you remember your first translating experience?

I think it was still at Rigpa in Paris, and it was not a live teaching, but a replay of a teaching which I translated in French. You know, if you are a singer, it helps, you know how to work with your voice…

Your voice is pleasant to hear…

Thanks, but it is not only a matter of having a good voice, but also being used to being "on stage", using your voice and body, not being shy etc…

Have you ever translated for Yongdzin Rinpoche?

Never, or maybe for five minutes, an informal talk. That would have been another story, because we must admit that Rinpoche´s English is very personal and not easy to translate.

What was your first translation – or more precisely interpreting, to distinguish it from written translation – for the Bon community?

My first time was translating Khenpo Gelek during a weekend of teachings in Paris. Long time ago.

How was it? Khenpo Gelek also uses English in his own way.

Yes, it was probably a bit harder than translating Khenchen Rinpoche, but much easier than translating Yongdzin Rinpoche.

How long have you been translating Khenchen Rinpoche´s teaching?

Ten years I would say, more or less. We should ask Christophe to check.

You are quite familiar with the subject, you know many Tibetan dharma words…

When I was younger, I was quite "obsessed" with studying the teaching and I used to read many, many books, and this helped with the learning structure and vocabulary of the teachings. It obviously makes translating easier. And I also had this friend, Francois, whom I mentioned earlier. He translated for many lamas. I could flood him with all kinds of questions regarding the teachings. I also had the chance to discuss lots of things with Philip Cornu and Stéphane Arguillère, both highly knowledgeable scholars who translated texts of the doctrine. Stéphane actually translated Yongdzin Rinpoche after Francois. Both were generous enough to bear my endless and various questions.

Lately, the translation has been shared between you and Dominique, Yungdrung Tenzin. You both have a very different, very personal style of translating.

I would say that I am humbly trying to follow the lineage of Francois Calmes. He was really impressive as a translator. He could sit, not taking a single note, with Yongdzin Rinpoche speaking for ten minutes, and then was able to reproduce it perfectly. I was often inspired by his translations,

as he made things clearer and more alive for me.

There is a dilemma which all translators face: whether to stick to the letter or to the spirit of what was said. And I have always leaned toward the latter: preferring translating the essence, the spirit, to a word-for-word translation. With this, of course, you can drift or overdo things sometimes. But I have always felt reassured by the fact that Khenchen Rinpoche can follow the translation quite well and indeed sometimes he did correct me. But since it does not happen often, it makes me feel that I probably deliver the meaning of the original text correctly. If sometimes I over-emphasize something, it is because I really put my heart into it. My aim is to inspire people and keep them interested.

You and other translators offer your service for free, right?

Yes, this is our offering to the sangha. And it is true that when I translate, I cannot enjoy the teaching in the same way as when I just listen and contemplate on what was said. Originally, I did not talk about it as a work but actually, it is a work, you have to be very alert and conceptually active all the time. And sometimes I do feel quite tired after translating, especially when I did both the morning and afternoon sessions. I realized that I really had to get enough sleep to restore my energy.

Pictures: Jitka Polanská

Good things, bad things: understand the reality of impermanence

written by Jitka Polanská



In January 2024, Khenpo Gelek Jinpa started a series of online teaching on the Dzogchen foundational practices, so called *ngondro*. For 9 consecutive Sundays, 6 – 7 PM "Shenten time" he is instructing both new and seasoned practitioners how to tame and purify the mind so that they can bring to fruition the main practice of Dzogchen and realize the true nature of existence. We are going to publish a few concepts from some of the sessions.

- When we practice, lots of distractions come. That´s why self-commitment and self-discipline is so necessary. When we have them, joyful effort naturally comes, and our knowledge grows constantly.
- When we conceptualize our experiences, we often feel confusion and lack of clarity. Contacts with the objects of five senses bring up our impurities. We liberate them directly in meditation but when we cannot do that then we can apply our analysis, out of the meditation. Take your time, instead of just running after your feelings. If we do not use our wisdom, we are being interrupted all the time.

- Never feel alone. With the Guruyoga, you can feel the presence of your masters in the heart.

- Remind yourself about the preciousness of the human life and its impermanence. To understand the impermanent nature of the reality is very important, for a practitioner. Bad things, good things, accept the life events as they come. Liberate all the disturbances that arise with the methods that you know.

Diagnose yourself and find a remedy: this is a stance of a meditator

written by Jitka Polanská



In January 2024, Khenpo Gelek Jinpa started a series of online teaching on the Dzogchen foundational practices, so called *ngondro*. For 9 consecutive Sundays, 6 – 7 PM "Shenten time" he is instructing both new and seasoned practitioners how to tame and purify the mind so that they can bring to fruition the main practice of Dzogchen and realize the true nature of existence. We are going to publish a few concepts from some of the sessions.

- Is there still almost no control over our mind, little peace of mind, after many years of practice? No need to be sad and discouraged about that. We simply acknowledge it and find a

remedy.

- We have to examine ourselves and our accomplishments, investigate our problems which obstructs our meditation and figure out how to overcome them. We have to be aware of what interrupts our state of meditation. This is an attitude of a practitioner.
- Direct liberation of thoughts and emotions is the supreme method but if we cannot manage it we do not pretend that we can and we apply a gradual way.
- Some people say: My actions come out harsh, but there is peace in my mind. My belief is that if we are peaceful inside our actions reflect it outside.
- Mostly, we are all beginners and should consider ourselves as beginners. Only when we are stable in dzogchen meditation we can call ourselves accomplished practitioners. Until then, we have to follow our masters´ instructions wholeheartedly and with complete devotion. They went the path before us and completed it. Remember that Shardza Tashi Gyaltsen Rinpoche who achieved the rainbow body repeated the ninefold practice of *ngondro* several times.

Guruyoga

With our devotion we can get connected to the essence of the awaken masters represented by Tapihritsa. We can truly experience his power of removing our emotional and mental suffering and qualifying us – through his blessings – to receive the teaching of Dzogchen.

He has knowledge, wisdom and compassion which can liberate us from all obscurations preventing us from walking the path. All our inner wounds can be purified by wisdom fire, wind and water pouring from the heart of an enlightened being.

Help yourself to experience the fruit of your practice

written by Jitka Polanská



January 14th, 2024, Khenpo Gelek Jinpa started a series of online teaching on the Dzogchen foundational practices, so called *ngondro*. For 9 consecutive Sundays, 6 – 7 PM "Shenten time" he is instructing both new and seasoned practitioners how to tame and purify the mind so that they can bring to fruition the main practice of Dzogchen and realize the true nature of existence. We are going to publish a few concepts from some of the sessions.

- Many of us spend so much time practicing and still are very unstable in our practice; often, we cannot keep our mind still even for one minute. This prevents us from experiencing the fruits of our meditation. The probable reason is that the foundation of our meditation is not good. We need to practise ngondro, the preliminary practices.
- Some people do not like to apply an effort which the foundational or preliminary practices require. They say: I prefer abiding in the natural state, that´s the best. The problem is that it is not possible without a good preparation. For the vast majority of practitioners – almost everyone – the gradual path is necessary and it starts from the foundational practices. We need to follow the instructions, not picking what we like or do not like, what seems easy to us.
- Unconditional devotion to the teaching and its instructions is necessary as much as an excellent motivation which is to practice for the benefit of not only ourselves but all the sentient beings.

Join us for a unique series of online teachings every Sunday from January 14 to March 10 at 6pm. Sessions are recorded and you can step in also when the course already started. The teachings are

based on the manual of Gyalwa Chagtri which is part of Zhang Zhung Nyen Gyud´s corpus of Dzogchen texts and was written by Dru Gyalwa Yungdrung, a renowned Dzogchen practitioner and scholar who lived in the 13th century.

Amchi Gege´s room was the center of everything, says Colin Millard

written by Jitka Polanská



Colin Millard, as a freshly graduated anthropologist with an interest in Bon and Tibetan medicine, spent from 1996 to 1998 eighteen months in Dhorpatan, a place in the western part of Nepal. He observed how future amchis, doctors of Tibetan traditional medicine, were educated at the local medical school and wrote his PhD thesis about it.

Colin, you gave your two-year-old son the name of the son of the Irish god of medicine. Does it have anything to do with your professional interest in the systems of traditional medical science?

I was attracted to the name partly because of my interest in medicine. Cian is a Celtic name; and at the same time, it exists as an Iranian name. My wife is Iranian, and we sought a name which would make both of us happy.

Let us talk about your professional background and get from there to your research of traditional medicine in Bon tradition.

I began studying anthropology in 1988. I graduated in 1993, in five years instead of four because I took a year out to travel around India. And that´s how I got interested in Tibetan medicine.

You did not go there with this already in mind?

No, I was quite interested in Hindu tantrism at that time. But I came across many Tibetan people in India. When I arrived in Bombay, the Dalai lama happened to be there. In Delhi, I stayed in a Buddhist guesthouse and I heard that the Kalachakra initiation was happening. I traveled to Sarnath in northeast India, the place where Buddha Shakyamuni gave his first teaching, and sat through the Kalachakra initiation for three weeks. It was fascinating, there were around one hundred thousand people there. It was my first deep experience of Tibetans and their culture in India.

How did the general fascination narrow down to a specific interest?

To cut a long story short, I met a Tibetan lama in South India who suggested that I should study Tibetan medicine. He knew somebody in Ladakh, so I ended up going to Ladakh the following year – to do research with traditional medical practitioners. I spent five months there looking at how a Ladakhi *amchi* had been supported by the NGO Save the Children Fund.

You had not encountered Bon yet.

No, it was only during my PhD studies that I shifted to Bon traditional medicine, which I observed in detail later, at the Bon medical school in Dhorpatan.

Before that, I went to Tibet, to explore whether I could do research in Lhasa on that topic, but it did not seem to be feasible. I also went to a Tibetan medical school in Sarnath and to the Chagpori Tibetan Medical Institute of Trogawa Rinpoche situated in Darjeeling. Trogawa Rinpoche was a famous doctor of traditional medicine. I was thinking of studying what they were doing there but then I met Yongdzin Rinpoche and my plans changed.

Where did you meet him? And how did you know about Yongdzin Rinpoche?

I had heard about Bon culture during my early visits to India and wanted to know more. I went to Triten Norbutse when it was still mainly a building site, probably in 1994, I can´t remember exactly. I did not find anybody there at that time. I went back a couple of years later and met Rinpoche then. When I told him that I wanted to do research about Tibetan medicine, Rinpoche told me about the Bon medical school in Dhorpatan, in the west of Nepal.

The school was established not long before, is it correct?

That´s right, in 1992. I went there four years later, in 1996, the year when the Maoist insurgency in Nepal started. It went on for ten years.

What did it mean for the people who lived there?

Dhorpatan valley is situated next to Rukum and Rolpa districts, which were Maoists strongholds. It is a very remote place, so in case of trouble you cannot expect police or army intervening quickly. I remember that when I was deciding whether to go, that year, a few Nepali people in Kathmandu told me “do not go there, it is full of Maoists, it is dangerous”. But Tibetans from Triten Norbutse thought there was no real danger at that moment, and they were right, as it showed later. So, following their advice I went to Dhorpatan, despite the Maoists. It was still a peaceful place, but that changed after a couple of years, Maoists were taking over villages, there was a lot of violence and it spilled over to Dhorpatan. I think that was one of the reasons why the medical school was eventually moved to Kathmandu. I left in 1998, after having spent eighteen months there, with some breaks.

How difficult was it to go up and down?

Quite difficult. Normally people would take a bus to nearby towns Baglung or Beni. From there you had to walk four days. Just before Dhorpatan you had to cross a pass called JaJa la on a path winding through the jungle. Dhorpatan is on the southern side of the Himalayas, so it gets the monsoon and that's why there is such rich vegetation; it is very, very beautiful. The bottom of the valley is 3000 meters of altitude; because of the monsoon the hills are covered in rich alpine forest, while Mustang on the other side of the mountains is a desert.

There are also many medicinal plants growing in Dhorpatan. That's one of the advantages of the school being there – they could collect the medicines from the surrounding hills. Now that the school is in Kathmandu, the students still go to Dhorpatan every summer to collect the plants and learn about them on the spot.

Was the school founded there because of these favorable conditions, do you know?

Well, it may have played a role, but there is also a Tibetan refugee settlement, one of the oldest that was established in the sixties. It is the location of the first Yungdrung Bön temple in exile. Dhorpatan was full of Tibetan refugees in the sixties, and many lamas were among them. I think that Lopon Sangye Tenzin, the teacher of Yongdzin Rinpoche, lived there for a period, as did Yongdzin Rinpoche himself. They all came to Dhorpatan first, and then moved on. Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung was born there, but he went for his education to Menri monastery in India when he was very young.

There are five small villages in the valley; three of them are predominantly Buddhist and two of them are Bonpo. The medical school was situated in the compound of the Bon monastery, Tashi Gégye Thaten Ling.

You must have been isolated from the outside world for those eighteen months. Were there any phones around you could use?

I do not remember but I think there weren't any telephone lines. There were no mobile phones at that time, obviously, and no internet connection either. It was not common even in Europe. I remember that in 1998 somebody told me to try to send an email and I did not know what it was! (laughing)

There is a small town called Burtibang one day walk away from the medical school where I lived, with more facilities. Sometimes I went there to get more interesting food, for example. But I do not remember telephoning anybody.

Otherwise – what was your usual food?

Tsampa every morning. For lunch there was rice and potatoes, occasionally with some dried meat. In the evening it would be thugpa made with rice. And that was every day.

How did you communicate with local people?

With my broken Tibetan. I was able to hold a conversation in Tibetan , but I was not fluent.

Your purpose was to study the education of students of traditional medicine. How did you do?

Amchi Gege, the head of the school, accepted me as a student. It meant that I could be present at any activity of the school. There was also geshe Tenzin Dargye who is now the khenpo of the monastery, and he assisted me a lot, translating for me. Every morning all the students would have their lessons and I would sit with them and watch what they were doing.

Medical schools were part of the monasteries habitually, right?

Yes, traditionally it was like this, and the students were monks, as Amchi Gege was. There have been some very famous medical schools connected with monasteries. And both Triten and Menri monasteries now have medical schools, but the form of education has been brought up to date. It is no longer necessary to be a monk to study there, and both males and females are accepted as students.

The modernisation of Tibetan medicine education has been going on for a long time. In the early 20th century the Men-Tsee-Khang in Lhasa had moved to a western model of education with a fixed syllabus and exams, now it gives a recognized university education.

How many students were at the school in Dhorpatan when you were there?

They were nine, four of them girls. Monlam, Lhasom, Tsela and Chunsom, and five boys, including Amchi Nyima who many Westerners know from Shenten Dargye Ling. He was older than the others, he had already studied at Menri, in India. Nyima comes from a family lineage of medical practitioners and he had also spent time studying with his father.



Colin Millard and Amchi Nyima became friends then…

You were observing their education day by day. How did it go?

Amchi Gege was a traditional teacher, and a demanding one – the program lasted nine years. But the school already had some modern aspects. Amchi Gege was quite structured and introduced fixed lessons, for example, and some written exams, but the education was very much an apprenticeship

with the students learning by assisting him in his medical practice.

As for the theory, he gave one hour of teaching every day, going through the main text of Bumzhi and then explaining it with the help of commentaries. The main commentary and the key text in that school was written by Kyungtrul Jigme Namkhai Dorje. The lama was a prominent doctor and scholar active in the first half of the 20th century. He was originally from Kham, but he founded a monastery near Mount Kailas, called Guru Gyam. I was curious about this figure and his legacy; I asked Amchi Gege questions about him and later carried out research about him including visiting Guru Gyam.

Did the students have to learn the Bumzhi by heart?

Yes, Amchi Gege placed a high value on memorization and required the students to memorize the whole text. In his view, memorizing is not only providing you with knowledge, it is also a matter of lineage, it is a precise transmission of the sacred words of Tonpa Shenrab. By memorizing them you are identifying with the Buddha of Medicine.

I remember observing memorization exams: the students had to say the part they learned loud in front of Amchi Gege. They had written exams as well.

Bumzhi is quite similar to its Buddhist equivalent, isn´t it?

Yes, they are almost identical. When I met Yongdzin Rinpoche, he mentioned the main text the students were studying was the Bumzhi. I was familiar with the main text of Tibetan medicine in the Buddhist tradition, the Gyuzhi, and I was very eager to know the other one. I thought: maybe I was going to discover a new Tibetan medical text that nobody knew (laughing). Then I found out the two texts differ very little, except that in the Bumshi there are more Zhang-Zhung words and a different account of the medical lineage.

The first of the four volumes talks about the origin of the text and uses a tree as a metaphor of the whole medical system. In the Bumshi the medical teaching takes place in Olmolungring and the teaching is given by Tonpa Shenrab to one of his sons, Tribu Trishi who requests it. In the Buddhist version the teaching occurs in the mandala of the Medicine Buddha who emanates two sages representing his speech and mind, and the teaching is given as a dialog between these two emanations.

Some students in Dhorpatan learned from the Bumzhi and some from Gyuzhi.. This was fine with Amchi Gege, as he was convinced that Gyuzhi was copied from Bumzhi and anyway the two texts were almost the same.


Colin Millard at Shenten Dargye Ling, August 2023

As for the practical aspects of the studies – what did you see?

Everything happened in Amchi Gege's room. He would sleep there, everyone had their food there, lessons were given there, and patients would come there – any time during the day. At that time there were two hundred and fifty Tibetans living permanently there, but many people, especially Nepalis, would come to the valley in the summer to grow crops and stayed for three or four months. The valley became quite active in the summer, with around one thousand five hundred Nepalis resident in the valley in that time of the year. The clinic was open to everyone and most of the patients who came were therefore Nepalis. Usually around two patients came each day, sometimes up to seven. And when they came, students learned by assisting Amchi Gege. Occasionally he would ask them to do the diagnosis, feel the pulse, or examine the urine. When he did the diagnosis he would explain to them what he found. In this way the students developed expertise by engaging in the practice of the master, becoming masters themselves under his guidance.

How was Amchi Gegey as a person, did you like being in his presence?

Yes, I did. He was traditional and hard going, but also generous and compassionate. He would treat patients for free if they did not have money to pay for medicines. And he was funny as well. One of the traditional ingredients of a medicine is the wild pig´s shit – of course transformed, I think burned into ashes before being used. And I remember him telling his students to be careful to not pick a human one, instead. There are not many toilets up there…

You must have spent lots of time together. Some other interesting or funny memories?

In the evening, we ate thugpa together – after the prayers – and we chatted a bit; sometimes he just would sit with his texts and study. Lama Sangye was there, at that time, too.

I remember that Amchi Gege liked asking questions about the British royal family. My knowledge of British royal family is very limited though (*Colin laughs*) but I tried my best to answer. And I remember, that once, after a pause, he said: my king was born from an egg!

Amchi Gege was from Kham, from Kyungpo. The thing is that the word *kyung* means a "garuda", an eagle, in Tibetan, and Kyungpo is predominantly a Bonpo area. Red Garuda practice is very common among Bonpos. There are two lineages, the red lineage and the white lineage of *kyung*, and the red one is connected with the kingship in Kyungpo – and that's what he was talking about.



Amchi Gege and geshe Tenzin Dargye

Amchi Gege said many interesting things. I remember him talking once about infectious diseases. In Tibetan medicine they arise from imbalances in nature caused by a certain kind of enraged spirits. Once he was teaching about *nyene*, which is a disease caused by a spirit called *nyen.* And he said that according to his grandfather there was very little *nyene* in Tibet, but it increased after the first world war.

In remote places like Dorpatan there are many stories of spirits in lakes, rocks and rivers and how you have to be careful to not disturb them. There are many Bonpo rituals that are concerned with maintaining a balance with the natural world. Quite often, students at medical schools were involved in some of those rituals.

For Amchi Gege, there was a direct link between Bon religion and Bon medicine. He was a monk himself and I think he would have preferred his students to be monks as well. Three of them were monks, they became monks when they entered the school. And because they were monks, they were involved in rituals more than others. When someone got sick with a disease that required a ritual, the students helped Amchi Gege to do it, particularly the monk students, and Amchi Nyima, who comes from a *nagpa* lineage of lay religious practitioners.

My son will continue the family tradition of Tibetan arts of healing, says Amchi Nyima

Were the rituals part of medical education?

Some rituals which I saw, like the one for *sadak, lu* and *nyen* spirits – were done to prevent illness from happening, as a kind of prevention. Others were done as a remedy when people got sick. They include sometimes an offering of an effigy of the person to the spirit asking them to stop causing the harm. There are also soul retrieval rituals to restore the lifeforce of a person.

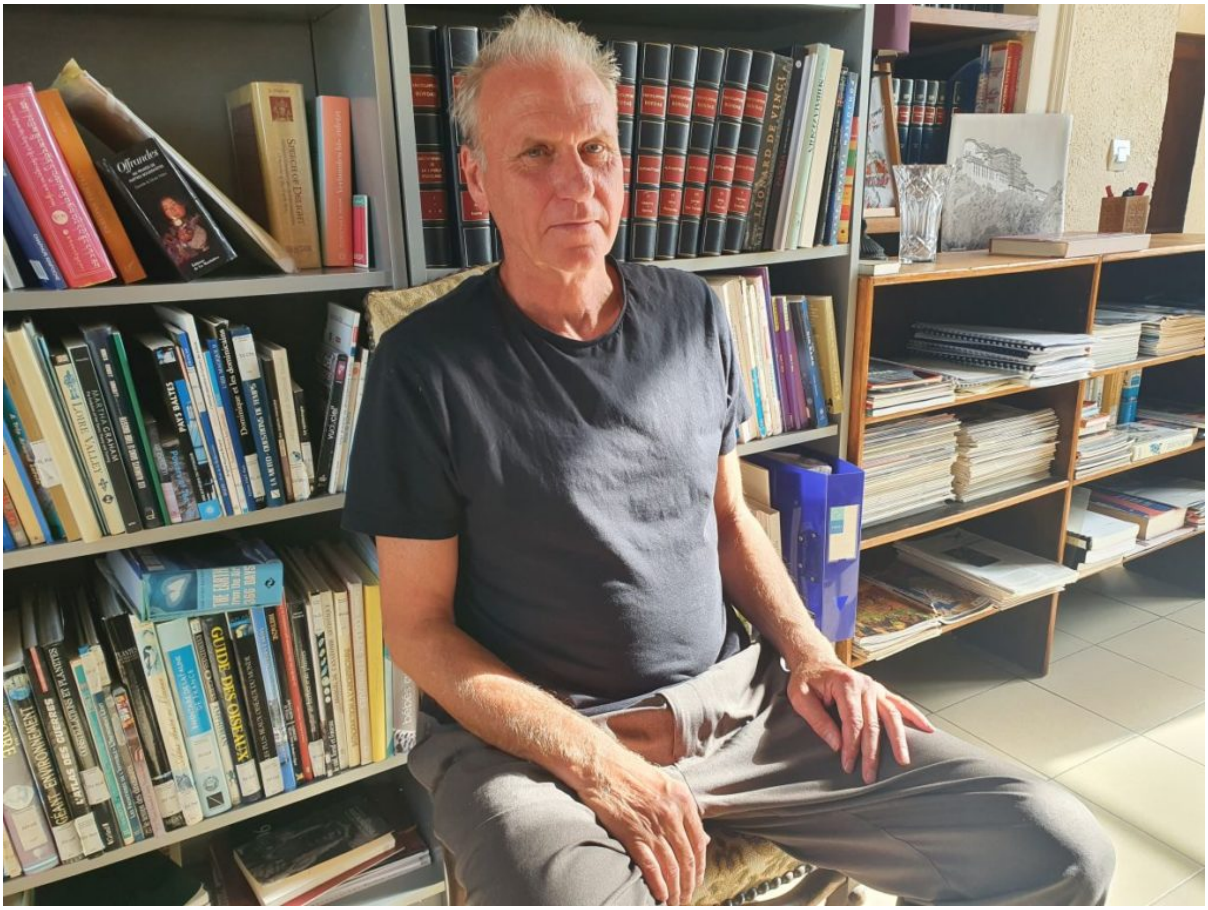
You can diagnose if a sickness is caused by spirits. In the chapter dedicated to diagnosis through examining the pulse there is a section about how to distinguish a disease caused by spirits. There is also a section on this in the chapter on urine diagnosis. I remember Amchi Gege throwing a medicinal powder in the urine and observing what happened and deducing from it which spirit it was who caused the problem. So, to answer your question, yes, it was a part of medical knowledge that Amchi Gege was transmitting to the students.

I described it in detail in my PhD thesis. Maybe I will publish it one day.

Did all the students that you met at the school graduate, eventually?

Five of the students who were there at the time went on to complete their studies. Amchi Gege led the whole mission of transferring the school to Triten Norbutse where it is now. The students also moved from Dhorpatan to the new location. Those who graduated did it in Kathmandu. The school has continued to enroll more students and several more have completed the course. Amchi Gege passed away a few years after.

Colin studied social anthropology at the University of Edinburgh, receiving his MA in 1993 and his PhD in 2002 for a dissertation on 'Learning processes in a Tibetan medical school'. This was based on his fieldwork at a Tibetan Bonpo Medical School situated in the valley of Dhorpatan in west Nepal.



Colin Millard at Shenten Dargye Ling, August 2023

Photos´credit: Jitka Polanská and Colin Millard

Pearls of DailyGelek 5: COMPASSION IS DIRECT SEEING

written by Jitka Polanská



As a response to the covid times and the imposed seclusion, for a couple of years Khenpo Gelek Jinpa gave support to Shenten´s community with his regular online teaching from Gyalwa Chaktri, the famous practice manual of Bon Dzogchen. At the beginning, those one hour long meetings took place every day, and combined thirty minutes of teaching with meditation. They were attended by up to three hundred people and many of them expressed their gratitude to the lama. During those encounters, Khenpo la repeatedly shared his key instructions. We decided to collect some and present them as a series of daily reminders. We continue with "COMPASSION IS DIRECT SEEING"**.**

Compassion doesn't mean being sad and sorry for those who suffer, to pity them. It is a direct understanding of their condition and situation. It is wisdom.

Instead of getting upset with someone who is mad at you, you can immediately see that he cannot control his mind and behave differently. You have understanding for him or her and the causes of their suffering.

To reach this state of mind is not easy, but with practice it´s possible. First, we have to generate a compassionate attitude with reflections, train ourselves conceptually with this intention. Later, slowly, slowly, compassion will appear as a natural quality of the mind.

We should start developing and deepening our compassion towards people who are close to us (including ourselves). This is our training field. If we are able to do it, then we should extend our compassion further, even to people we do not like.

Compassion and loving kindness should be the foundation of our practice, intended not as sentimentality, but as deep seeing, true understanding that we and others are basically the same. Deeply understand that what we feel, other beings feel, their pain is the same as our pain, our struggle for happiness is their struggle, too.

A school full of children who can learn and be happy

written by Jitka Polanská



In Siliguri, a city in the Indian state of West Bengal, a boarding school was established almost six years ago for children from remote villages in the Himalayas of Nepal and India. The children from a poor background have blossomed quickly there and have got the same aspirations and dreams as their peers from well-to-do families. "I want to go on studying and then set up my own organic food business. In our mountains, all the food is organic," says Mamata, who is in the eighth grade.
(*The article was written for www.eduzin.cz, a Czech magazine about education, and later adapted for Speech of Delight).*

The day starts radically early here, by European standards. At 5.30 am, in an instant, the sound of

children’s feet outside my door turns the stillness of the night into a very busy morning. The room for the sick, temporarily converted into a guest room, where I am currently tossing and turning on a rather hard bed (which makes for a very light sleep), is located on the boys’ floor next to the bathroom with toilets. I can hear slamming doors, boys’ voices of varying pitch and intensity, and a mix of other, vaguer sounds. I wanted to experience the school from wake-up time to peace and quiet at night, but now I am not getting up, I do not want to disrupt the boys’ comfort zone as they wash up and use toilets. They’re super polite, I’m sure they’d greet me with a head bow, even while half naked, and some would say good morning Miss! – but I’d rather just imagine the bathroom scenario. In half an hour, a few dozen children need to take their turns in the toilet and at the sinks, and the same is in the girls’ ward, one floor above. In all, there are about a hundred and sixty children living here. By six o’clock, everyone must be usually dressed in tracksuits, to start thirty minutes of physical exercise.

I’m visiting the boarding primary school in Siliguri, West Bengal, India. THIS (Tise Himalayan International School) was founded by Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung, the abbot of Triten Norbutse monastery in Kathmandu, and his team, but it is not a religious school, it is a social project, a school for children from remote Himalayan villages in Nepal and India, and especially – though not exclusively – for those belonging to the ethnic minority who speak Tibetan dialects. The main objective is to provide children from poor families with a mix of modern and traditional education based on the ancient Himalayan culture and values associated with Buddhism, such as peaceful co-existence of people and harmony between man and nature. Why did the children have to leave the mountains for the bustling city for such an education? Let me explain.



Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung with THIS students. Read about the history of the school by clicking on the picture.

Into the unknown, in search of happiness

Mamata Rokaya is sixteen and she is in the 8th grade. She came to the school six years ago when it opened. “Honestly, we couldn’t put a sentence together in English back then,” she says in her now decent English. She was excited to go to the school, unlike other children who, when asked, replied that they were a bit afraid of the unknown. She remembers the beginning as difficult, but “then we got used to it and now we are all friends, brothers and sisters,” she says.

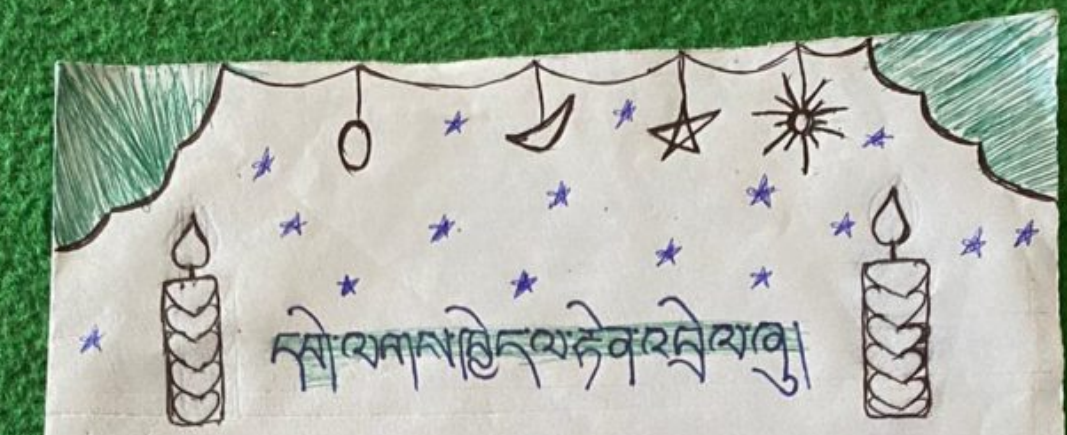
A multi-talented girl, top of her class and a great dancer, Mamata passes on her dancing skills to her classmates, on weekends and holidays. Dancing is popular among the girls here, they learn it from each other and by following videos on Youtube. “Since childhood, I have always wanted to be a dancer. Then I realized that I wasn’t that good and now I rather want to go on studying and then set up my own organic food business. In our mountains, all the food is organic,” the dark-eyed girl says to me, smiling.





The children learn elements of traditional arts and crafts. (Mamata is in both pictures.)

Boarding schools are an unimaginable thing for many European parents, but in Nepal and India they are common. From the hill areas, many children leave for boarding schools located in a nearby or a more distant town before the age of ten, by twelve they are the majority. The trend has intensified a lot in recent decades. This is related to the increasing value of education as a social and economic lift, and also to the decline of traditional forms of earning in the mountains. The Himalayas are losing their population and there are not enough good teachers there. But children from the poorest families who cannot afford alternatives depend on the local public school in their village or one nearby, and they often don't learn much. "It used to happen that our teacher didn't even come," one boy remembers. "We liked not having to do anything then, but now I realize we were wasting our time," he adds. In addition, Nepal's and India´s state schools usually do not teach Tibetan language and Tibetan culture.



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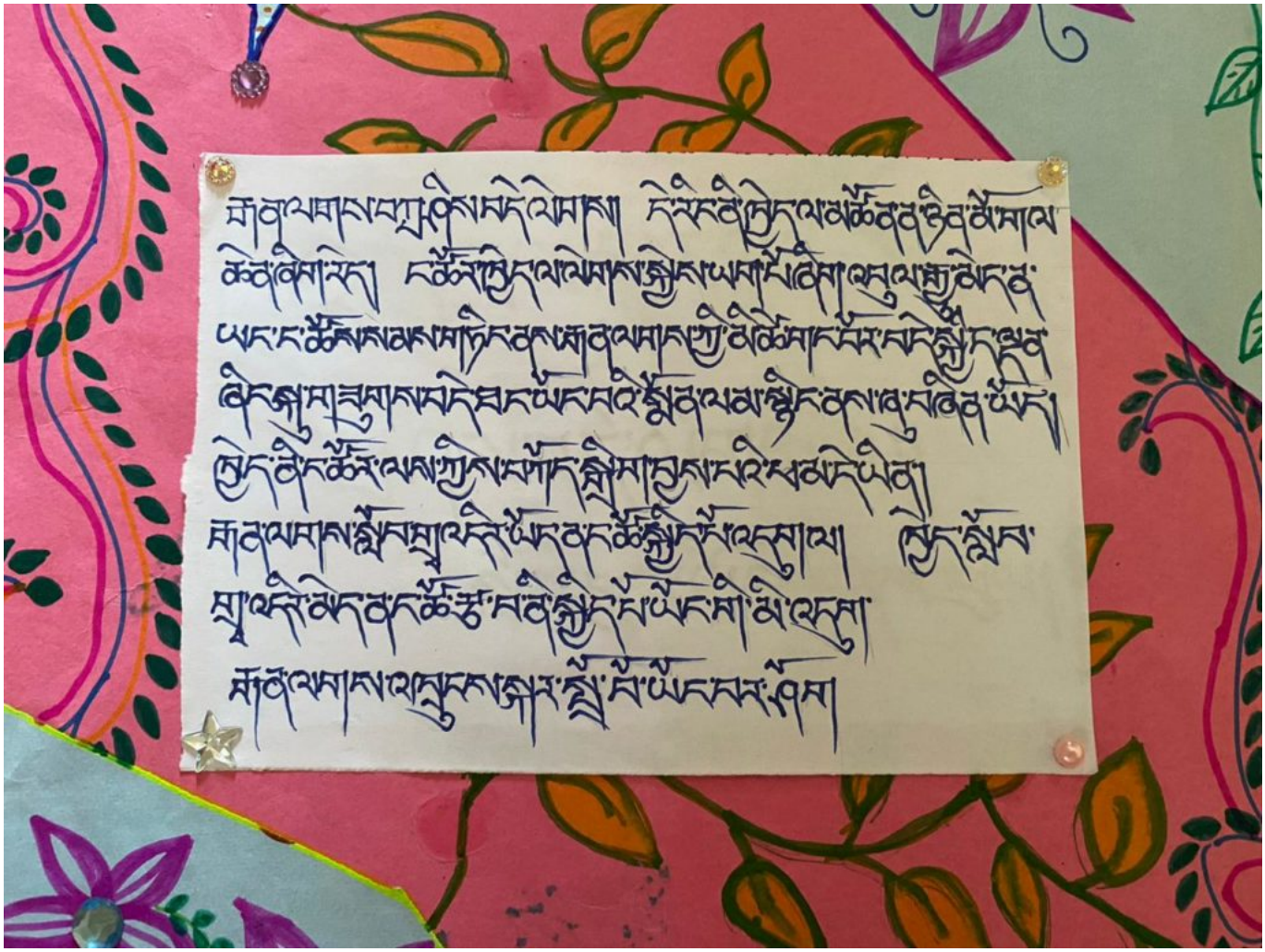
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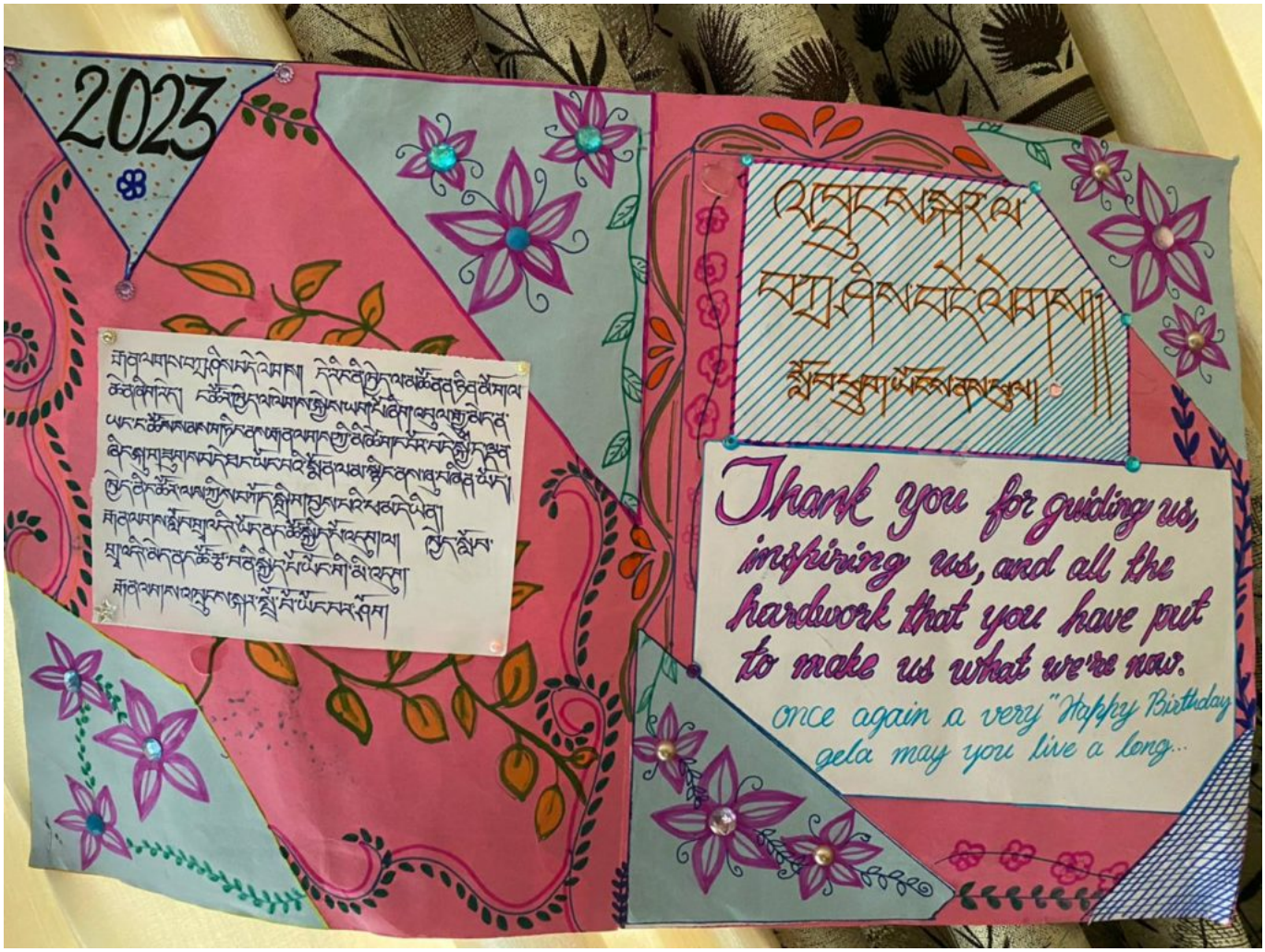
Happy Birthday

To you

Norbu Gherda

By:- Danita Gaurung





The children are mastering three alphabets at THIS.

“In our village, we speak a language called ´khampa´, which is similar to Tibetan. Our family used to speak this dialect, but then we switched to Nepali because Nepali is taught at school and I was more fluent in it,” Mamata says. Families of the linguistic minority are slowly losing their cultural roots tied to their original language.

In this school (THIS), Mamata learns three languages, just like all the other children: Nepali (which is one of the official languages in West Bengal´s Darjeeling district), Tibetan and English. There is a 45 minute lesson a day for each language. Linguistic training is very intensive from pre-school onwards, with children having to master three different alphabets and three different scripts.

Education in self-confidence

This week, the usual morning PE does not take place, as the school is going through final testing in all academic subjects – I arrived at the very end of the school year. The kids got up at the usual hour but instead of jumping they had got the task of reviewing the curriculum before breakfast. Some went to the dining hall and repeating out loud what is written in their handbooks; others sit outside quietly, in pairs, threes, or alone. Some look focused, others a bit drowsy, under the hood of their sweatshirts.


Rinchen Thapa and her students

I am watching the exercises the students usually do in order to get their blood flowing in a couple of Sonam Norbu's short videos. *Kenla* (Tibetan word for teacher – that's what the children call him and the other adults) has been taking care of the children since it opened. Officially, he is the president of the founding organization, which in reality means that he is on the spot all the time, being in charge of the hostel and of the well-being of the children. He knows all of them by name and also by their story. He has visited many of the families where the children come for himself.

"I was part of the team that went to the mountains on a recruitment trip in 2017 to offer families a place in our school," he says. "We saw a lot of poverty there; some children had no mother or father, some fathers drank too much alcohol. Some children were herding cattle in the mountains all alone," says Sonam Norbu.

The morning exercise, he explains, is basic Tibetan yoga. The children in his videos are lined up in rows behind each other and together they do different, dynamic movements, stretching their arms out in front of them or jumping up with their knees bent, shouting out different syllables during some of the exercises. Tibetan yoga, as well as short meditations in the morning and evening, typical folk dances in long-sleeved clothes that are waved gracefully in the air, or painting of Buddhist mandalas – all of this is taught to the children during art classes or in afternoon and weekend workshops. The school conveys elements of Himalayan as well as Indian culture and its customs to the children, and does so in an experiential way. There is definitely lots of singing, dancing and drawing. There is also a strong emphasis on environmental education, which is not considered a new, fashionable subject here, but a kind of continuation of the traditional veneration of nature typical for the Himalayan folks, and of their inclination to live in a sustainable way, in harmony with

the natural environment.



Tibetan yoga every morning

The third educational and upbringing goal – in addition to providing modern education and the transmission of cultural traditions – is one that comes about perhaps automatically when both of the previous ones are met. “We want the children to know their value, not being inferior to anyone, to know that they can have the same aspirations and dreams as anyone else,” says Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung. In other words, the children’s sense of self-worth and dignity is as important for the founders of this school as much as their education.

Kids who can defeat boredom

The life of the school has a tightly structured schedule from wake-up to bedtime, which brings an interesting contrast to the liveliness and vitality of the children. They can completely calm down on command, but they are not sheepish at all. When they play, they play vigorously and make lots of noise. And they are left to play freely. “Everything has its time, if they play, let them play!” says Sonam Norbu laconically.





Some games are everlasting…

I like to watch the children playing, they are dexterous and resourceful and able to find their own way out of boredom. A group of five little girls, I guess six years old, are sitting in a circle under the staircase of the dormitory, throwing pebbles in the air. There are a lot of them – pebbles – here, unlike toys. They throw one, two, three pebbles with one hand and catch them again, in the palm of their hand and on the back, chattering, showing each other how to do it. Great exercises for motor skills.



Many boys and some girls enjoy football.

Football is very popular here. Especially – but not only – among the boys there is a lot of enthusiastic football fans and passionate players. Many of them dream of becoming famous footballers. Fifteen-year-old Binod gets up at 4 a.m. every day and trains himself. “Dreams don’t just happen overnight, you have to work for them,” he says judiciously. Love for football also makes the boys avid readers of the local newspaper (its sports section), which hangs on the school´s notice board.



Reading news about their favorite players…

No child has a smart phone. But occasionally I see a bunch of kids surrounding an adult who is showing them something on theirs. On Sundays, the children use the adults' phones to connect with their families.

The role of the extended family at the boarding school is taken over by the school team, teachers and caregivers. Many of the teachers and other members of the staff live in the school complex together with the students. "My wife and young daughter live in Kalimpong, which is about two hours away by car, and I visit them on weekends. During the week, I stay overnight at the school. I miss my daughter, but like this I dedicate more of my time to our pupils. Their parents are far away, so we adults try to replace them," says the head teacher Nikhil Khati.

The cardboard water cycle

Yungdrung Lhamo, a young teacher originally from far away Ladakh, also lives at the school. As a young girl, she also went through boarding school far from home and says it taught her to rely on herself. We are talking in the school's library where she is showing me what children created on her class subject. Yungdrung Lhamo teaches "social studies" which includes geography, and she has assigned to to the students to represent the water cycle in nature. "We have a lot of cardboard, so I encouraged them to make something out of it," she says. Her students made perfect use of the limited resources. Thanks to their skills and imagination, cardboard wrappers were transformed into evocative, pointy mountains, houses, and bridges with blue rivers flowing underneath. Cotton wool became clouds, leaves and pebbles formed nature. "They did great, they're clever and creative," the teacher praises the chilren.


Children can create something meaningful out of nothing.

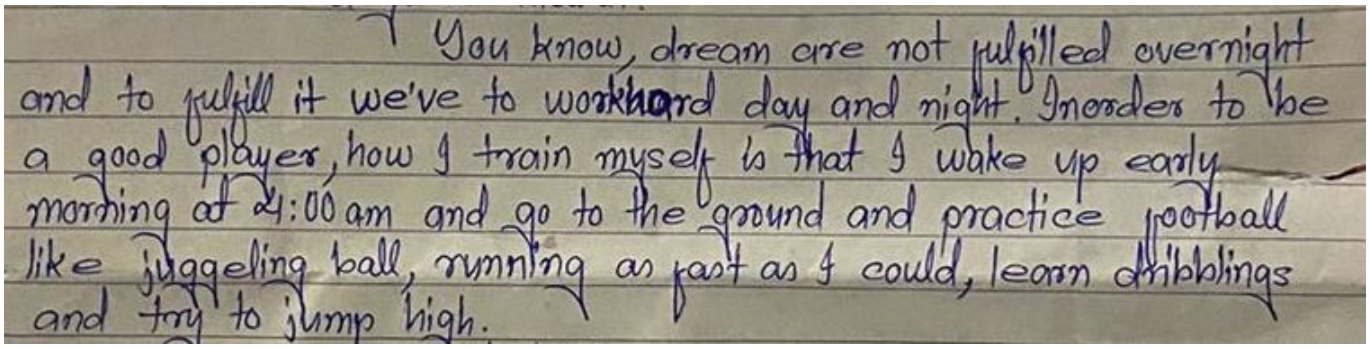
Another young member of the teaching staff is Rinchen Thapa. She graduated in political science and English and teaches English to the second and eighth graders. Rinchen comes from a village close to the city of Darjeeling, which is eighty kilometers far from the school. She is from a Tibeto-Nepali family, but is only now catching up with Tibetan as an adult. “When I see children learning it, I myself feel like learning it properly,” she says.

Compared to Tibetan, English is not a complicated language, she thinks. “I mainly try to make the students use it actively,” she says, adding: “With twenty five children in a class it is not easy but I still want to involve them as much as possible.” Some children commit to continue learning languages out of the school hours. “We girls in our dorm made a vow to only speak Tibetan or English to each other when we enter the room so that it would get more in our blood,” Mamata tells me. Such an attitude certainly makes teachers´ work easier and the students´ progress quicker.


Spelling Bee 2023…

Yungdrung and Rinchen are also “house masters”. All children of the school are divided into four formations, so-called houses. Each house has its own color and is named after one of the four important Asian rivers: Indus, Brahmaputra, Sutlej and Karnali. They all spring at the mount of Kailas in Tibet (which is named Tise in Tibetan and the school’s name, Tise Himalayan International School, is derived from it).

Yungdrung Lhamo and her colleague Sonam Tashi Bhutia lead the yellow Indus, while Rinchen with her colleague Sweta Rai are leading teachers of the blue Brahmaputra, helped by Sonam Palden and Kenrap Gyatso – just as an example. House masters are reference teachers for forty or so children of different ages of their “house”. The school holds competitions in which teams from each house engage. They include public speaking, art projects, sport events or dance performances. “I try to encourage even shy kids to participate. Recently I convinced a girl to perform in front of others, she built up her courage and got more confident afterwards,” says Rinchen Thapa.


You know, dream are not fulfilled overnight and to fulfill it we've to workhard day and night. Inorder to be a good player, how I train myself is that I wake up early morning at 4:00 am and go to the ground and practice football like juggeling ball, running as fast as I could, learn dribblings and try to jump high.

Binod: Dreams are not fulfilled overnight, we have to work for it.,

The children also learn a lot just by being involved in the running of life in the hostel. On Sundays they collectively clean up. Every day brings many interactions with classmates of different ages, peer learning is a matter of course here. As the children get older there are more duties and responsibilities waiting for them. Older pupils help the younger children in the food line to keep their plates straight, while they are served by others; in the morning they have to ensure that all the children get up and dressed on time. Each of the four houses has a captain; and he or she has the most responsibilities. Mamata and Binod the footballer were or still are captains. “Taking care of

others and organizing things for them is a lot of work, but sometimes it is fun," Binod says.

Some people don't get the chance

I am looking at a photo of parents with the first group of children who arrived at school in 2018. The wind-swept highlanders often look far older than their biological age. Life in the mountains has been getting easier slowly slowly, roads are being built, infrastructure is improving. But the situation of small farmers who work in the fields or keep cattle sometimes gets even worse, as traditional trade disappears and competition grows. Most parents of THIS students do hard manual labor, and they look accordingly. Even their children in shabby clothes in the photo look different from the children I meet at school, yet they are the same children. It's as if their faces have brightened.



Parents and children heading for the school.

Nawang Sherpa is the vice-head teacher and he received the first wave of children at the school. They had to be taught everything from the very beginning, including basic hygiene, as he remembers. He has always encouraged his team to communicate a lot with the children, emphasizing English in particular. "Children are smart and can learn a language by imitating adults," he says. "My advice was: in the classroom, keep the textbooks closed and mainly talk to them. Tell them stories, talk about what interests them, and give them space to respond!" A very skillful pedagogical attitude, I would say. Children are in good hands here.

Thank to all the mentioned educators and other men and women working at the school that I didn't have time to talk to or make them fit into the text, the children are in a very different situation than the trajectory of their families' lives would have predicted. They are planting a seed for a better life

than their parents have.

Hopefully there will be more kids to come and get this opportunity. The school collects no tuition and is financed by donations only. It doesn't live high on the hog. In the photos, the school uniforms look elegant, but on closer inspection you can see many other things, like a hole in a shoe. The food is also modest. Eggs and bread or boiled chickpeas for breakfast, rice, potatoes, lentils and vegetables for lunch, noodle soup with meat or vegetables or rice, potatoes and vegetables again in the evening. For snacks the children have tea with milk and sugar and roasted rice, sometimes fruit. Different, more fancy meals are served on special occasions, maybe once a month, sweets very rarely. But the diet is well thought out, the children look healthy, have white teeth and sparkling eyes, and some of the boys have outgrown me already.



Praising the food before meals.

I look at the children's writing, drawings and other evidence of learning (how it is called in modern pedagogy) and see that the pupils can concentrate and achieve results. Also, when they play, they do it eagerly and joyfully. And it's clear from what they tell me that they understand education is their chance. A chance which many people of the mountain communities of Nepal and India were not given. "Many intelligent people I know well could not study, their potential remained unfulfilled, which is sad to observe. The problems in our communities are largely rooted in the fact that people could not study," says the school's founder, Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung, who himself comes from a mountain village in Nepal. He, together with Sonam Norbu and other members of the staff believe that the school they established can break the chain of adversity that binds poor families.

I wonder what plans they have for the children when they grow up and leave the school. Don't they

expect the graduates to return to the mountains and devote themselves to revitalizing their villages? Some of the similar schools invite their students to commit to their communities´welfare.

“Of course, if they return home, it will be good, it would help their communities, but we don’t expect only that and it wouldn’t be realistic either,” says Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung. “If young people want to broaden their horizons and go elsewhere, we should not force them to stay. It wouldn’t work anyway,” he articulates his philosophy. And after a moment of reflection, he adds: “Actually, it might even be a good thing if they go out into the world. That way they can share the values this school has transmitted to them with other people and influence the world positively.”

THIS school leaves a vast space for children´s dreams.

Pictures: Jitka Polanská, Tise Himalayan International School
The article was originally published in www.eduzin.cz, a Czech magazine about education.

Pearls of DailyGelek 4: KARMA IS MORE POWERFUL THAN BUDDHA

written by Jitka Polanská



As a response to the covid times and the imposed seclusion, for a couple of years Khenpo Gelek Jinpa gave support to Shenten´s community with his regular online teaching from Gyalwa Chaktri, the famous practice manual of Bon Dzogchen. At the beginning, those one hour long meetings took place every day, and combined thirty minutes of teaching with meditation. They were attended by up to three hundred people and many of them expressed their gratitude to the lama. During those encounters, Khenpo la repeatedly shared his key instructions. We decided to collect some and present them as a series of daily reminders. We continue with "KARMA IS MORE POWERFUL THAN BUDDHA"**.**

Karma is more powerful than Buddha. We should not take it as an abstract concept. After all, we can see it in our everyday experience. When we feel love, everything externally appears as beautiful and we are filled with joy. With those emotions, we plant a seed of positive karma. On the contrary, when we are pervaded by a negative emotion as anger or jealousy, external appearances darken and become negative.

Every thought, emotion and action leave a karmic imprint, as a foot leaves an imprint in snow. Every moment we have a choice to live a situation in a positive or a negative way. Our mind is a wonderful creator of everything, be aware of it. That's why human life is so precious. It gives us a rare opportunity to discover peaceful, loving, compassionate qualities of the mind, its true nature, and let them prevail in our life.

Christine: Many people wished for a teaching and practice done step by step

written by Jitka Polanská



Christine Trachte – Halder and her husband Norbert Halder are close students and friends of Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche who is the abbot of Bon monastery of Triten Norbutse in Kathmandu. Together with him they manage Yungdrung Bon Stiftung, a foundation based in Germany which helps the monastery and projects affiliated to it. Christine also organizes Khenchen Rinpoche´s teaching in Budhasweg near Frankfurt.

Christine, you organized a cycle of teaching and practice in Germany, led by Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung, which was sometimes called a "mini-gomdra". What distinguished these retreats from others?

Our group met three times a year and received Dzogchen teaching from Khenchen Rinpoche step by step. We also train in Dzogchen meditation under his guidance. For me, it was a big difference compared to previous retreats. Before that, I could go and listen to teachings only during holidays. I worked as a schoolteacher and for logic reasons, I could not choose my holiday freely. So, for many years, I only picked parts of the teaching here and there, I never completed an entire cycle.


Christine at Shenten, the summer 2022.

After I retired, I had more time and could afford the luxury to go to theses retreats, follow a teaching from the very beginning and practice accordingly. Khenchen Rinpoche went quite slowly, especially at the beginning, and he did every step with us, guiding our practice, practicing with us. Initially, there was only one teaching session, in the morning, and all other sessions were dedicated to practice. It was a wonderful, deep experience.

How many people registered for the “mini-gomdra” retreat?

Around one hundred people, mostly from Germany. Only a half or a bit more than a half of them arrived at the end of the cycle, but I think it is still a very good result. It went on for eight years! We started in 2015 and the cycle concluded last year. Of course, there were the covid years in between. For two years, 2020 and 2021, we could not meet.

Did other participants also feel the benefits of going through the whole cycle, did you get their feedback?

Very much. Everybody who stayed until the end said that their lives were changed very much for the better. Out of their gratitude, many of them became generous supporters of Yungdrung Bon Stiftung, helping to sustain the monastery and THIS, the school for the children from the Himalayas, which is our heart project.

We all went deeper in our meditation. We also became very close to each other, and one could feel that special kind of energy being there, and a sense of protection. The experience was quite unique and special for me.

Soon, the next cycle with Khenchen Rinpoche is going to start. But the format will be different. Can you explain it?

Again, Rinpoche is going to start from the beginning and go through the whole text, which is, in this case, Kusum Rangshar by Shardza Rinpoche, which refers to the Atri Dzogchen cycle, as an extensive commentary to its practice manual. The difference is the frequency: it will be only once a year, but the retreat will last six days. Another six-day long retreat with Khenchen Rinpoche in Germany will be organized in the spring and dedicated to a healing practice.



Christine and Margit, another participant of the “minigomdra”,with Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung at the castle of Saumur near Shenten Dargye Ling, just after the initiation of Lishu Tagring in 2023.

How did you happen to be the organizer of Rinpoche’s teaching?

In 2008, I joined the board of Yungdrung Bon Stiftung. The foundation was founded in 2000 by Wangden Kreuzer with the aim to support Triten Norbutse Monastery in Kathmandu, the home monastery of Yongdzin Rinpoche. 2008 was the year when the founder and his sister left the board.

In 2011 I became the main manager of the foundation and Norbert stepped in also, first as the treasurer and gradually taking on more duties. The foundation is surrounded and supported by many German practitioners who formed a community around it. We all used to meet during Yongdzin Rinpoche´s teaching in Germany once a year. The last year it was in 2014.

In the same year, I think, someone pointed out that people who have regular jobs have some difficulty attending a complete cycle of teaching. Those people longed for the possibility of receiving teaching from a teacher coming to Germany possibly a few times a year and teaching us on long weekends (from Friday to Monday), in a series of teachings. Many people really waited for something like this! And Khenchen Rinpoche agreed to it, committing to come three times a year. People were so enthusiastic about it! And I, in the role of the manager of Yungdrung Bon Stiftung, happened to organize it.

Christine, you also attended the meditation program of Shenten Dargye Ling, Gomdra. It extends over four years and lasts seventy days every year. This year is the last one of this cycle which started in 2019. What was your motivation to enter this program?

After I tasted the fruits of the "mini-gomdra" in Germany – if we can call it that way – I wished to go on longer retreats, and as soon as I could – after retiring – I applied for the Gomdra at Shenten. Unfortunately, this year, due to my health problems I had to leave after one month. But I really liked being there, I find the format very supportive.

Nobert, you have been following the teachings of Bon for a long time. When and where did you meet Lopon Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche?

I remember the first time I went to Lopon´s teaching was in Blanc in France in 2001. I think someone from the Dzogchen community of Namkhai Norbu told me about the retreat. I had gone to retreats with Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche and Sogyal Rinpoche before finding Bon. Lopon´s main topic is Dzogchen, and this is what I am interested in, that's why I stuck to it. I do not understand much about tantra and do not have much connection with the ritualistic part of Buddhist and Bon teachings, I stay with what is understandable and clear for me – Dzogchen. I am not even particularly interested in which cycle the text is from, it is all one teaching, for me.

And you, Christine, how did you meet Bon?

At that time when Norbert went to Blanc, we already stayed together but I could not go with him because, as a schoolteacher, I did not have holidays. I went in 2003 when the teaching was organized in August, which is a good time for teachers. The teaching with Lopon felt very familiar to me, and we continued coming in the following years. We became a part of Rinpoche´s community and sangha. Compared to the teachings of Namkhai Norbu or Sogyal Rinpoche, these retreats were less crowded, which we liked.

What is your profession, Norbert?

I studied physics and I have been self-employed in the field of electronics.

And you said you worked as a teacher, Christine, right?

I studied to be a teacher, but I also studied communication and taught communication skills in commercial courses. After I moved to Norbert´s hometown in Bavaria, I worked as a teacher in all kinds of schools. I taught German and history in middle school and grammar schools, but I also worked with adults and with students of vocational training.

Allow me one personal question. You are both practitioners and you are husband and wife. Where did you meet?

Christine: Norbert and I met in August 1999 in Lerab Ling founded by Sogyal Rinpoche, as we were both Rinpoche´s students. I remember it very well. In October 2000, I moved from Westphalia to Bavaria, Norbert´s region, and we have stayed together since then. In 2003, as I said, I met Yongdzin Rinpoche and Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche who, since the beginning, was accompanying Rinpoche during his teaching in the West.

Photo: Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung, Jitka Polanská

Riccardo and Lodoe: We met by chance and became close friends

written by Jitka Polanská



Bön teaching came to the Italian most eastern region of Friuli – Venezia Giulia thanks to a deep connection and friendship between Riccardo Vrech, a student of Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche and instructor of yantra yoga, and geshe Lodoe Tsukphud, one of the teachers at the Dialectic School of Bön monastery of Triten Norbutse in Kathmandu, Nepal...

When and how did you meet for the first time?

Riccardo: In 2003, I started my anthropological research in Dolpo. It is a high altitude, remote region of Nepal, culturally mostly Tibetan. At that time, it was even more isolated than today. To get from Kathmandu to my final destination I took two flights and then continued with three days of walking.

Arriving in Kathmandu, a few days before my departure for the Himalayas, I went to Triten Norbutse monastery. I wanted to meet Lopon Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak, a master well known to all students of Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche.

As you may know, there are many stairs leading to the monastery, and as I climbed them and reached the top, I looked up and there was a monk standing there and watching me. It was Lodoe. He was very friendly. He took my hand and led me to the monastery. He showed me around, we went to the temple, to the library of the monastery…

Do you remember that moment, geshe la?

Lodoe: I remember it very well. There is a path around the monastery, which we walk sometimes, and I just happened to be close to the entrance to the monastery when Riccardo arrived. He smiled at me nicely, and he looked ready to say something. That was how I felt when our eyes met.

How was your English, geshe la, at that time?

Lodoe: My English was close to zero, but we talked somehow, also with the help of some other people who were around. Riccardo told me that he was a student of Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche and I understood that he came to meet Yongdzin Rinpoche. He also told me "I am going to (the lake of) *Phoksundo*". This made me pay attention immediately! It is my birthplace! I told him: "If you need help when you go there, tell me."

Riccardo, did you have anybody in Dolpo helping you to organize your travel?

Riccardo: My main contact was the director of Tapriza school, Senduk Lama. He helped me a lot. But the help of Lodoe came in very handy. He registered a message to his family on my video camera, to tell them to welcome me and take care of me. Today, he would just have a video call through whatsapp but then there was nothing like that.

When I reached Phoksundo, Lodoe´s family, the father, the mother, a brother – they all showed great hospitality to me. I lived with them as their guest for a couple of weeks that time, and later I came to stay with them a few more times. It took me three years to conclude my research. I always stayed in Dolpo two, three, or four months at a maximum.

And whenever Riccardo traveled through Kathmandu, you met, I imagine…

Lodoe: Yes, every time Riccardo went to Nepal, he came to see me and visited the monastery.

The friendship then developed furtherly and geshe Lodoe started traveling to Europe. Which year was it for the first time?

Lodoe: In 2011. Riccardo invited me to Italy, and I also have one friend in France and one in Germany and they both invited me to their countries. I went to France first, visited Shenten Dargye Ling, and from there I traveled to Germany and after that to Italy.



“Riccardo and I have confidence in each other.”

Since then, geshe la is coming to teach in Italy. Did you count how many times the teaching has taken place?

Lodoe: This year was the fifth, or the sixth time.
Riccardo: At the beginning it was quite difficult due to the language barrier. The original idea was to translate the teaching from Tibetan, but it was not easy to find a translator from Tibetan to Italian. I organize everything just as a private person, with friends, in an informal way. However, we managed to have a translator for Tibetan in the first year; Anna De Pretis translated in Italian. But then, for practical reasons, we decided to switch to teaching in English.

Lodoe: My English was really poor but what to do, I tried. I already had a little experience with speaking in English in public talks, usually small conferences of one two hours, that Riccardo organized. Riccardo translates my English into Italian. Last year and this year, Federico and Clara translated, they replaced him.

(Note: Federico Ballarin and Clara Lovisetti often translate teachings organized by Shenten Dargye Ling.)

What was the topic of the teaching this year?

Riccardo: We have been going through the preliminary practices – *ngondro* – of the Gyalwa Chagtri, the practice manual of Zhang-Zhung Nyen Gyud cycle of Dzogchen teaching. Next year we will be finishing the last part of the *ngondro*.

I want to say that since the beginning, I recognized the deep knowledge of geshe la and I have complete trust in him as a teacher. It is not easy to transfer this rich, ancient and complex knowledge to the West but I am confident that people here in Italy can benefit from what we do and we will continue to do.





Geshe Lodoe Tsukphud and his translator Federico Ballarin, during the teaching in Italy, October 7-8, 2023

Geshe la, do you like teaching to the Western people?

Oh, I do.

Dolpo is a place where Yungdrung Bön was once very strong. Is that correct?

Lodoe: Yes, the teachings from Zhang-Zhung arrived in Tibet through Dolpo, and there were very important local lineages there but they have been dying out in the past two or three generations.

Riccardo, coming back to your experiences in Dolpo: what did you like the most, there? What surprised you or impressed you?

Riccardo: It was like stepping into another dimension. When I walked through Dolpo, I went through forests, I crossed mountain passes, it was a full immersion into nature. You can see 360 degrees in very far distances. Breathtaking views, space everywhere! And in Lodoe´s birthplace, there is the unforgettable lake…

Dolpo at that time was classified as one of the poorest regions in an already poor Nepal – it has got an "A" region´s rate. But it is not what you feel there, because of the open heartedness of Dolpo´s people, the way they welcome you and share whatever they have with you. It is really touching. You feel very rich there, actually.

And I have the same question for geshe la regarding Europe, and especially Italy.

Lodoe: When I was landing at the airport of Venice for the first time – it was in the evening, six or seven o'clock – I was amazed, seeing so many interesting and unknown things on the land and on the coast and on the islands. I was wondering: "Is this place existent or not?" It is like you see the reality but still you cannot believe deeply.

I felt very lucky to visit Venice. For me, it looks like a dream within a dream. We have real dreams at night and our life is also a kind of dream. And Venice is another dream on top of our dreaming (*he laugh*s). Venice is a wonderful place. A dream island (*he laughs*).



I really like coming to Italy. Riccardo and I have confidence in each other, feeling close. I like Italian people for their natural behavior. They do not hide, they are open. You can really enjoy being with them.

Photos: Geshe Lodoe Tsukphud, Riccardo Vrech, Jitka Polanska

Pearls of DailyGelek 3: WHAT DOES LIBERATION MEAN?

written by Jitka Polanská



As a response to the covid times and the imposed seclusion, for a couple of years Khenpo Gelek Jinpa gave support to Shenten´s community with his regular online teaching from Gyalwa Chaktri, the famous practice manual of Bon Dzogchen. At the beginning, those one hour long meetings took place every day, and combined thirty minutes of teaching with meditation. They were attended by up to three hundred people and many of them expressed their gratitude to the lama. During those encounters, Khenpo la repeatedly shared his key instructions. We decided to collect some and present them as a series of daily reminders. We continue with "WHAT LIBERATION MEANS" **in the context of Dzogchen practice.**

It is important to understand what liberation or enlightenment really means, according to the teachings. We have to liberate our own impurities, our negative emotions. The impure mind is the source of suffering, samsara and nirvana are within our own mind.

If we hold on anger or jealousy, it means we do not really recognize the harm it causes to us. By liberating our negative emotions all enlightened qualities arise naturally in our mind.

Abiding in the state of rigpa is the most effective and powerful method how to liberate the mind but not so easy to apply, steadily. We have to check on ourselves and see what works, there are other supportive methods of releasing negative emotions and patterns, in the teachings.

We have to be honest with ourselves. We can be in the dharma for twenty years and feel proud about our seniority, but if we are not able to work with our emotions, we are in the same situation as a beginner.

In order to achieve liberation or at least go ahead on the path toward liberation, we have to understand what we, personally, need to liberate. We have to understand our anger, how it manifests, how it obscures our mind. If we keep our obscurations, it is like keeping a needle stuck in our body, it will hurt us. It is our ego who refuses to recognize our flaws, our obscurations, it looks away from them. It is scared to see. Be creative, see how your mind works.

Trul khor brings quick result and lots of benefit, says Geshe Lungrig about Tibetan yoga

written by Jitka Polanská



Encouraged by Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung, Geshe Lungrig Namdag taught Tibetan yoga to the participants of this year's summer retreat at Shenten, during the morning meditation. "I have developed a strong connection to the exercises, I experience clearly the power they have to improve our meditation and our health, and so I am motivated to share this message with others," he says.

Do you remember when you heard about *trul khor* for the first time?

First briefly, let me say something about myself. When I was young, around thirteen or fourteen years old, I went to the monastery in my hometown, Khyungpo Tengchen Gon. My brother was already studying at the monastery and he encouraged me to join. At the beginning, I was taught reading and writing in Tibetan and chanting. After some time, I decided to become a monk. There were around sixty monks there, at that time, not many. Nowadays, more than three hundred. My brother has become the abbot – khenpo – of the monastery in the meanwhile.

As a monk, I continued studying chanting, playing ritual instruments like the drum *damaru*, and also I was introduced to the preliminary practices, which I completed. We were a group of monks and for more than one hundred days we practiced only *ngondro*.

After that I started slowly with the main practice, meditation, also *phowa*, I was sixteen, seventeen, maybe, at that time. When I was eighteen, I went on a pilgrimage, with my brother and other monks, we were seven eight monks all together. We went to holy places like Menri monastery, Yundgrung Ling monastery, Bonri, all very special places.



Did you get familiarity with *trul khor* already in Tibet, or only at Triten Norbutse where you studied later?

Already in Tibet, at the Khyungpo Tengchen Gon. We did one hundred days of *tummo* retreat and practiced different kinds of *trul khors.* We were explained how to do before the retreat started. My brother taught a group of monks to which I also belonged. Later, I received further teaching about *tsa lung trul khor* from Drubdra Khenpo, Geshe Gelek, Khenchen Rinpoche at Triten Norbutse, and practised it.

In Tibet, *tsa lung trul khor* is not taught widely, only to those who are seriously interested. They have to do some preliminary practices and meditation and only after they are given the teachings.

Now you teach *trul khor* yourself. Was it something that you liked from the very beginning?

I think I am more interested in *trul khor now*. I like it very much because I understand more the benefits of these exercises. It is very beneficial for all of us, whether we are a *sutra* practitioner, a *tantra* practitioner, or a *dzogchen* practitioner. Our physical body is very important for everyone. We say that if you want to cross a big ocean, you have to have a good boat. If your boat is not very good, you cannot cross, and you can even drown. We always speak about the mind, the mind is like a captain of the boat. But the body is also very, very important on the spiritual path, and that's why *yoga* and *trul khor* have been practised. People who are not on the spiritual path do sports to take care of their bodies, and we have yoga exercises. I arrived at that conclusion. I myself do as much as I can and I also want to show other people how to do them.

Do you do yoga exercises regularly?

Not every day, from time to time, and especially when I have some teachings on yoga to do, I train for two three weeks before, and also I study texts speaking about these exercises.

I noticed, when you taught us this summer at Shenten, that you compare different sources of texts. *Tsa lung trul khor* in its various forms is described in different texts.

Yes, I checked the texts written by Shardza Tashi Gyaltsen, also *Zhang-Zhung* Nyen Gyud, which contain instructions for the set of exercises I was teaching you during the summer. Also, *Ma Gyud* texts speak about *tsa lung*, also *A-Tri*… They are quite similar to each other, and especially their effects and benefits are similar.

You said that in Tibet these exercises were not taught to everyone. Nowadays, they are taught openly, you even give courses on zoom. The approach has changed...

I think the idea is that it can help many people on the physical, energetical level. Even if they do not do it as deeply as tantra practitioners or dzogchen practitioners who transmitted those teachings, they can feel the benefits immediately. Just after doing the exercises people can immediately experience more openness, energy rising up and flowing freely. This is very positive. Everyone can improve their meditation by doing these exercises. In the morning, we can warm our body with yoga and expand space in our mind quickly, it is a good means against sleepiness. It also brings a feeling of joy and happiness. It increases our pure mind.

Our physical body is made of five elements: space, earth, water, fire, wind… All forms of this universe, not only humans but also plants, rocks, everything, is made of five elements. We are closely connected with those elements. In a text it is said that we have four limbs and a head, which is five altogether, and five are also the elements which are the basic components of our body. When the power of the elements is exhausted in our body, we die. When the elements are balanced and harmonized, the body is healthy, and we experience much less suffering.





Yoga exercises help to harmonize the elements, to connect us properly with our elements, correct?

Yes, that's right, it is one of the effects. The essence of *trul khor* is described in the texts as a means to cut through illusions, to see the truth. Which is the purpose of all our spiritual practice. *Tsa lung trul khor* helps a lot to keep us on the path. If our negative emotions are strong, practicing *trul khor* helps to liberate them. In Zhang Zhung *trul khor* there are five preliminary exercises connected with the five elements, and then six root exercises which are designed to release our negative emotions of anger, ignorance, jealousy, desire, pride and drowsiness… The complete set contains forty movements.

You taught those five preliminary movements and the six root movements during the morning meditation at the summer retreat this summer. I found your method to be very good; we all practiced again and again what we had learned, as you added only one movement at a time so that we could remember and get familiar with it.

Yes, practice is important, otherwise people just listen to the teaching, but they do not have real experience. When we cook something, we must eat it. If not, it is all wasted. And we do not want to waste this precious teaching. *Trul khor* has been delivered to us by dzogchen masters who practised it and it was transmitted from a master to a disciple throughout the centuries, over thousands of years. Their main practice was Dzogchen, but they understood their bodies very well and they knew these auxiliary practices could improve meditation. And so they left a message for us about this very ancient technique.

When did you start teaching Tibetan yoga, at Shenten, do you remember?

I think that it started when Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche was teaching from the text of *Kusum Rangshar* about it and asked me to show the movements to the participants. It was a few years ago already. The same happened during a teaching of Khenpo Gelek Jinpa: he explained, and I showed the exercises. After that, they encouraged me to teach it on my own. I started already before the covid pandemic and during it, I did two times on zoom. Now it is included in the regular Shenten program. Besides that, I taught *tsa lung trul khor* in Hungary and in Poland. If they request, I teach it. I teach different things, depending on what the sanghas request: *Zhiné* practice, Sherab Chamma practice, Medicine Buddha practice. I was also asked to teach the Four generosities practices and how to make *namkhas*.

When did you first come to Shenten?

The first time was in 2014, it was just to visit Yongdzin Rinpoche. Khenpo Rinpoche told me that time that I was always welcome, so I came more and more, staying for a longer time, listening to teachings, helping… Now I am a resident lama at Shenten Dargye Ling.

Pictures: Jitka Polanská