The Longère: a top retreat place to become. Update on renovation

written by Shenten



The Longère is a long building adjacent to the Château of Shenten Dargye Ling. As you may know, it has been undergoing a profound transformation since the autumn of 2021. Once a woodcrafter atelier, built in the 17th century, Longère is currently being transformed into an attractive retreat place which would serve the community of practitioners connected to ShentenDargye Ling. Demanding and challenging work has already been completed on the building, but plenty of other things are still needed to be done.

To begin with…

The initial condition of the building was characterized by cracked walls with unsuitable interior coating, severely damaged exterior stones, an inappropriate and archaic drainage system which exposed the building and its chalk stone base to constant humidity and lastly a courtyard of soil interwoven with invasive liana roots. Much work, especially in the interior, has already been accomplished, thanks to many volunteers whereas most parts of the exterior repairs we needed to hire professionals.

Gutters from the scratch

Replacing the existing drainage system was a complex process. It started with a several-day strenuous removal of the liana roots to enable the drainage pipelines to be installed underground. Complete gutter replacement followed. Old zinc pipes around the roof were changed respecting the original material; rain gutters and pipelines were extended underground and proper water reservoirs built. New pipeline system channeling the rainwater runoff to the nearby lake was installed underground. A half meter thick layer of gravel bed was installed around the exterior base

of the building to stop excess moisture. Damaged eaves were repaired and heavily damaged cornerstones replaced.

As the cherry on the top, Khenpo Gelek reshaped the outside area and created a base for a future garden and terrace. All was done in three days.

Even though we are still far from the final accomplishment, the retreat room in the Longère already has had many interested prospective occupants. Drubdra Khenpo Tenzin Tsultrim being among them. Named by Yongdzin Rinpoche as the Treasure of the Instruction, this new retreat room, without a doubt, will be an excellent place for practice.

Inside out, upside down: Transformation of the interior

While many of the exterior reparations are mostly hidden from view, changes in the interior structure are striking at first glance. Some walls were removed and some new were built. There are now two separate rooms, each with separate entrances along with a shared kitchen, bathroom and toilet. Old cement isolation of the walls was removed. New natural hemp lime isolation, allowing the walls to properly breathe, will be installed by professionals this summer.



Electricity and water systems will be installed and the ceilings lowered to create needed space. Measurements for new windows and doors have been taken and we are awaiting the price estimates.

One big project on its own is the extension of the window door leading to the lakeside. The height of the door will be increased and the top frame ornamented by stones crafted and engraved with the Five Warrior syllables mantra – the beautiful artwork is done as an offering by Les Compagnons.



“If everything goes smoothly, as we hope, all work should be completed during this year. Please keep your fingers crossed!” says Shenten team led by Khenpo Gelek.

And to contribute towards the Longère project, please visit this link.

pictures and text: Yana Karamari

Geshe Sonam Gurung: I returned to my Mustang to help children there

written by Jitka Polanská



Geshe Sonam Gurung comes from Mustang where Bonpo communities have lived since ancient times. He studied at Menri monstery in Dolanji, India, and then returned to his native land. There, he takes care of children from poor families who are gradually losing their own culture, with the aim of reversing the trend.

Geshe Sonam, can you tell us something about your own journey into education?

My parents wanted me to become a monk. Monks are held in high esteem in our country and have the opportunity to get an education, so I did not oppose the idea. In 1981, when I was nine years old, I went from Nepal to Menri monastery in India where I could get full monastic education and training. I arrived there, accompanied by adults, after five days of walking and another three days of travelling by bus. The late abbot of the monastery, 33rd Menri Trizin His Holiness LungtokTenpai Nyima sent me to a regular school that the monastery had set up for children from the Tibetan community. After graduating from the school, at the age of nineteen, I took my monastic vows and began studying at the monastery's Dialectic School.

In 2011, Geshe Sonam was the main character in the documentary Bön: From Mustang to Menri.

How many years did it take you to complete your studies?

Fourteen years. I graduated in 2014.

Were the studies difficult?

Yes, the daily schedule was very intense. The core of the curriculum is Buddhist philosophy, but

besides that, we studied classical Tibetan language, Tibetan medicine, astrology…

Did everyone in your class graduate?

No. There were about twelve or thirteen of us starting out, but, for various reasons only four finished. Some got sick, some had to go back to their home villages.



Nine year old Geshe Sonam. An image from the documentary *Bön: From Mustang to Menri.*

You eventually returned to Mustang too. Did you plan that?

Many graduated monks return to their home monastery if there is any, in their area. But this is not my case, there is only a small temple in my village, not a monastery. Other monks stay at Menri monastery and work there, after receiving their geshe degrees. They become teachers or engage in the administration of the monastery. I had the advantage of being able to speak English which I learned at school, and I ran the guesthouse in the monastery for a while. I also started teaching, both monks and Western students. Then, His Holiness came up with the idea to revive the local bonpo community in Mustang. Yungdrung Bon used to have important centres there, many sacred texts were preserved in the area. But now the people in the mountains are losing their culture and traditions.

So you went back home….

Yes. We have set up a cultural and educational centre for children from poor families and orphans here in Jomson. I am responsible for forty children approximately. We take care of their education but also their psychological well-being, we try to offer them a second home. In poor families there is sometimes alcoholism or difficult family relations.

> The migration of children from Nepal's mountain valleys in search of education (to schools and monasteries) is a unique phenomenon. 75% of Mustang children aged 10-19 have left their home villages and live in monasteries and boarding schools located at least a few days' walk away. Their parents also send them straight to Nepal's capital, Kathmandu, or from Mustang to the next big city, Pokhara. Over the last twenty years, these numbers have more than doubled for boys, and for girls, who have traditionally stayed more at home, the increase in outmigration for education has even multiplied (from the study Depopulating the Himalayan Highlands: Education and Outmigration From Ethnically Tibetan Communities of Nepal, 2014).

What do you teach to the children?

The local schools teach them Nepali and sometimes English, which is fine, we're in Nepal, Nepali is important, as it is English, for communication with foreigners. In addition to it, I teach the children reading and writing in their mother tongue and some elements of their ancestral culture. I also teach them the basics of meditation. This is the best way to keep our tradition alive: to encourage children and young people to develop into harmonious beings.

I plan to build a monastery so that we can receive visitors and help from other learned monks. At the moment they have no place to stay.

What is life like for you in the mountains?

It's quite hard, just like for the rest of the people in this region. But I was prepared for it. What I learned at the monastery helps.

Geshe Sonam Gurung's "Mustang Culture and Education Centre" is based in Jomsom, a small town at 2,743 metres above sea level where many trekking routes start, including the popular Annapurna circuit.



Geshe Sonam with "his" children

As a monk I have a great freedom, Dominique

Troulay alias Yungdrung Tenzin says

written by Jitka Polanská



This is a second part of an interview Yungdrung Tenzin gave us during the last summer retreat at Shenten Dargye Ling. After talking about his experiences as a translator of the teachings which take place at Shenten and online, we asked him what it is like to be a monk, about his connection with His Holiness 33rd Menri Trizin and whether he has anything to regret.

Dominique, how long have you been a monk in Yungdrung Bon tradition, with the name of Yungdrung Tenzin?

Since October 1999. It has been 23 years. My previous life seems to me a bit like a dream now, very different from the way I live now. And I am quite happy to be a monk because I have a great freedom.

In which sense? People usually associate the monkhood with the opposite, with less freedom.

Yes, it is true, but I feel more freedom. As a monk, I am free from all kinds of mundane engagements, which can be quite heavy, including a regular job.

How do you sustain yourself?

When I worked, I put aside some money and now I use my savings to maintain myself. This allows me to do activities that entirely support my practice. It also makes it possible for me to offer myself as a translator when Shenten needs me and I am happy to be of benefit. This is great freedom.



Also, I do not have children, so I do not need to work in order to maintain them. Being single also means that I take decisions individually and do not have to negotiate with anybody. This all simplifies my life and I can focus to develop my spirituality, I can practice. It is easier, as a monk, to live every moment as spiritual. A lay person has to deal with many worldly, distractive conditions and can easily forget about spirituality, pursuing mundane goals.

I know of at least two western men who became monks in this tradition and then disrobed. What in your opinion can lead to it and what has been instead the cause for your stability?

I had experienced all things of life before becoming a monk, I had my emotional life fulfilled, with my relationships, and I had exhausted a need or desire to have more of it. Perhaps some others took vows before being really ready, they were not fully satisfied, and this dragged them back. I also had had an interesting work, I went many times to the movies, discotheques and restaurants, so I could leave this all behind me with no regrets. I was satiated. When the monastic life was offered to me by His Holiness 33rd Menri Trizin, I was already forty one. If I had been twenty-five, I think I would not have accepted.

Now, I am really happy to be a monk. But who knows what will be. It can happen to anyone that he or she cannot or does not want to keep their vows anymore so I cannot guarantee that I will be a monk for my whole life, but for now, it is a condition that I really appreciate.

For many years, you were an assistant of His Holiness 33rd Menri Trizin and spent a part of every year at Menri Monastery. When did you start going there?

Well, I stayed there five months right after my ordination. Then my visa expired, and I had to return to France. After that I was coming every year, for seventeen years, until His Holiness passed away, and always for several months.



Was it necessary to spend some time in the monastery, in order to be ordained?

It was not. You can request the ordination to the abbot at any time, and he may or may not grant it, depending on the answers you give to his questions. If he feels that you are a proper candidate and you want to join the monastic life for correct reasons, he can ordain you the next day. But usually it is done on the occasion of an auspicious day, like a full moon or an anniversary connected with Tonpa Shenrab Miwo or some other important figure in Yungdrung Bon, such as Nyame Sherab Gyaltsen.

How many years did you follow Bon before deciding to become a monk?

Two years, not very long. You know, I would use a metaphor, it was like passing the narrow point of a sand watch. By different circumstances I was brought there, as a grain of sand, and I happened to arrive at a completely new life. My life´s circumstances converged to bring me there. And when His Holiness suggested to me to become a monk, I reflected about it for a few days and said yes, because it made sense to me.

You were close to His Holiness, being his assistant, didn't you?

Yes, he was my spiritual teacher, he introduced me to some prayers, into meditation. But he was also very busy and so sometimes I did not see him for a month, even while being in the monastery. When I became his secretary, for English and French. I helped him write letters to westerners, and for that, we were almost in daily contact. We would sit next to each other, I would take notes on what to write. Sometimes he just sat next to me while I was typing the letter, without saying anything, reciting mantras. It was very special, the life I had with His Holiness.

A few months after I became a monk, he started to work on founding the nunnery at Menri. I went to see the site with him and other monks, and then I helped him with drawings of various buildings for the nunnery: the temple, the sleeping quarters, a medical school… I had been an industrial designer in my previous life and so I was able to make all the technical drawings he needed. I also looked after the construction work when the complex was being built. I became a monk at the moment when it was useful for Menri, I think. There was an amazing amount of building activity going on after 2000. When His Holiness passed away in 2017, all that he needed to build was finished. He had completed his mission.

When was the last time you saw him before he passed away?

I met with him in April and he passed away in September. I was at Shenten when I knew that he was not feeling well. I was told that he was in the hospital and then that he was out of the hospital and so I thought he was getting better. I should really have rushed to see him. I was waiting for a few days instead and then I applied for the visa but it took longer to obtain it and it delayed me furtherly… When I finally arrived, it was too late. This is karma.

On the other hand, your karmic connection made you spend so much time with him…

Yes, that´s true. His Holiness was my only contact at the monastery, in the beginning, and in general, he was my main connection there. I remember him every day. And we will see what happens. At the time of dying His Holiness may have connected with me…

His English was good enough, so that you two spoke together only in English?

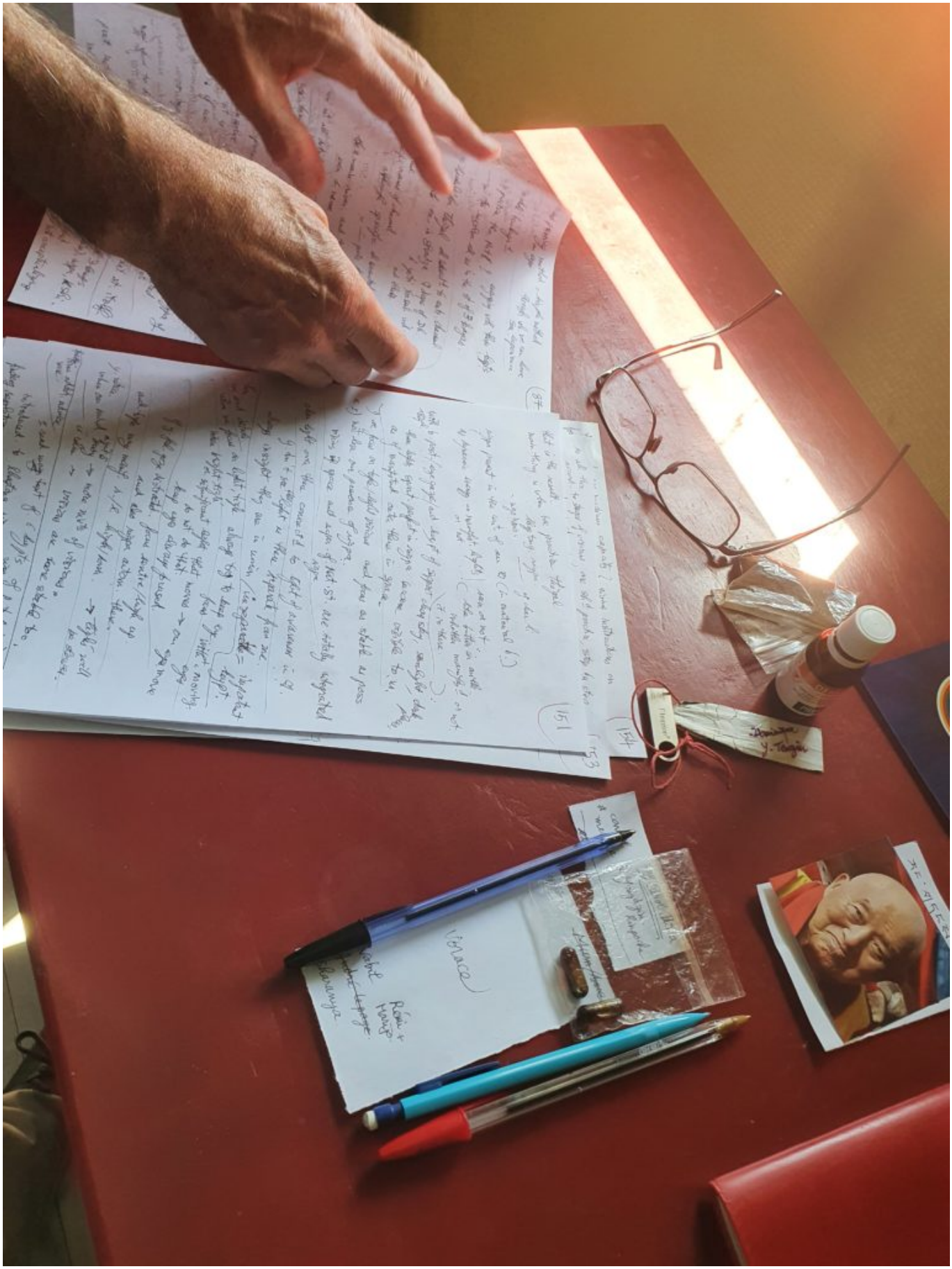
Yes, he was able to express himself and that was not so good for my learning Tibetan. I did not have many contacts with other monks, very few of them spoke English. I did not make an effort to have a social life in the monastery. It seemed to me a bit like a contradiction to leave a social life in Paris and replace it with another kind of a social life in the monastery. For me, being a monk meant leaving behind that part of my life and staying more on my own. I did not make an effort to make friends with other monks.

Being on one's own in the middle of a community is not the same as being somewhere in seclusion. Didn´t it make your life in the monastery a bit complicated?

It was frustrating at times, because I did not know what was happening. Sometimes I was very surprised that there was a ritual or something and I did not know about it. Or we had a holiday, and I did not know about it. Sometimes there was no food in the kitchen when I arrived to take it, and I did not know the reason. Many things like this. But this was my decision.

Do you regret not having learned Tibetan?

Yes, a bit. His Holiness did not push me in this direction and I had no real desire at that time to do so. If I really had worked hard when I was at Menri, building my language skills, I could have joined the dialectic school and I could have become a geshe. I could have explained to others rituals and teachings much better than I can do now. It did not happen and I have a different life now because of it. But this is not so important in the end. The most important thing is to realize the teachings. If I can embody the teaching, this would be the best.



The notes are extremely important for me, I write down the maximum that I can of what the teacher says, almost every word. I want to be as faithful as I can. I feel this is a big responsibility, because what is explained is of great importance. Actually, I do not

> *like having to write so fast, but this is the only way I can do it. My memory is weak, and I cannot keep in my mind a speech lasting sometimes several minutes. So I need to write these notes. I have written more than two hundred pages during the three weeks of the summer retreat. In the evening I go through my notes again.*
>
> From the first part of the interview. You can read it HERE.

What is the embodiment of the teaching, for you?

I am a dzogchen practitioner and, at the same time, I have to keep my vows. Which means to lead a very modest life, but from the highest perspective.

You are also very connected to Shenten Dargye Ling and to Yongdzin Rinpoche, you have come and stayed for teachings for many years...

Yes, I met His Holiness Menri Trizin in 1997 and Yongdzin Rinpoche one year later, in 1998. There was a bit of discomfort within me about who I should consider my root master, as if I had to choose between one of them. But maybe I did not have to. Anyway, Yongdzin Rinpoche introduced me to the natural state, and so I probably consider him my root master, and His Holiness is my other great master. I also have a very strong connection with Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche. He is very kind to me.

Now I hope to make the best out of all those favorable circumstances, of being close to these great masters, listening to their teachings, translating them and putting them into practice.

Pictures: Jitka Polanská

"Fire puja", a ritual unique to Yungdrung Bon was documented at Triten Norbutse. Watch the video

written by Jitka Polanská



A year ago the monastic community of Triten Norbutse monastery in Kathmandu performed an extensive ritual, Kunrig Lezhi Gyunnga. In this "fire puja", various kinds of offerings are burnt in fire and with this, obstacles of people, the dead and the living, are liberated. Esther Pérez de Eulate attended the ritual and documented it. Her video is now available on Speech of Delight´s YouTube channel and published here. We asked Esther about the making of the video.

Usha, my friend and the practitioner who commissioned the ritual, asked me to come to the monastery with her as a support and for company. I had not been there before and so it was a precious opportunity for me to see the monastery, Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche, my root master, and to witness such a remarkable event. I took my camera with me, this is a habit of an ex-documentarist.

Originally, there was a film-maker from Kathmandu hired by Usha to make a video of the puja but he was very busy and could not do the work, and so I offered to do it. My proposal was accepted and my camera came in very handy (although I did shoot some images with my smartphone). I was happy to bring some benefit to the tradition of Yungdrung Bon, to which I feel very grateful to belong, as a follower.



Usha: I have trust that this will come helpful at the point of the death…

It was not always easy to understand what was going on during the ritual, as there were many things happening at the same time. The event was extensive and complex, but I did my best to collect as much information and video material as possible.

The abbot of the monastery, Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche, who was the key figure in the ritual, explains the general meaning of it in an interview shown in the video.

> Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche: “The ritual is very popular, especially in the eastern part of Tibet. People usually make an effort to organize it when someone of their family passes away.”

Khenpo Gelek Jinpa, the head of Shenten Dargye Ling, who took part in the puja, explained together with the chant master of the puja, Yungdrung Tharching, the structure and the procedures of the puja offering.

> “Yongdzin Rinpoche told me that the puja is unique to Yungdrung Bon Tradition,” Esther says.



The ritual applies many symbols…

I made my first cut of the video by April of this year Then, I had to wait until autumn to meet Khenpo Gelek at Shenten to work on the second cut together. Khenpo Gelek leads the meditation program of Gomdra at Shenten, from September till November, and I attend the Gomdra. Its schedule is very intense but we still found time and worked on editing the film. A great fortune was having Lowell Britson and Ada Bird Wolfe at the Gomdra as well. Khenpo Gelek and Lowell edited the narrative of the video and made sure that it fits with the images, and the narrating voice of the documentary is Ada´s. After that, I took the material to Madrid, where I live, and finalized it.



All will be burnt, finally…

The ritual is amazing, incredibly impressive, especially in the second, culminating part with the open fire. Even if I see imperfections of the video, it still conveys the power of the ritual with its beauty, I think, and I am happy that I can offer it to the viewers.





At the end the complex texts of the ritual must be packed carefully and it takes time…

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=atdhOTVWJVs

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

written by Jitka Polanská



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

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

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

Later, you continued your studies in a monastery?

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



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

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

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

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

How are the studies at the school structured?

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

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

> From the study Medicinal Plants of Dolpo: Amchi's Knowledge and Conservation
>
> "Amchis usually begin their studies when they are in their early teens. They learn to identify the medicinal plants of the highlands in the summer and of the lowlands in the winter. They begin to treat patients after four to five years of study and practice."
>
> "In the modern world, people choose the medical profession for a variety of reasons, ranging from the motivation to serve others to that of gaining fame and prestige. The most important motivating factor for an amchi should be the desire to benefit other beings and to relieve them from the suffering of disease. Theamchis-in-training are constantly reminded of the six qualities (gyu duk) of intelligence, kindness, trustworthiness, practical experience, diligence and social awareness that they are expected to possess."

How many students are currently studying at the school?

Around thirty students, at different levels.

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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




T90



Collecting medicinal plants in the high mountains, cooking in the countryside, sleeping in shepherds´shelters…

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

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

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

to the mountains.

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

Around 10 – 15.

Do they have to pay for your service?

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

Are students of the school allowed to deal with patients?

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



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

What do you think about Western medicine, Geshe la?

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

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

> From the study Medicinal Plants of Dolpo: Amchi's Knowledge and Conservation
>
> "After collection, the plant parts are washed properly,and then dried either in sun or in

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

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

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



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

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

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

lung.

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

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

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

You can read the study Medicinal Plants of Dolpo: Amchi's Knowledge and Conservation HERE.

Pictures: Geshe Dennyi, Jitka Polanská

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

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

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

written by Jitka Polanská



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Shardza Tashi Gyaltsen

DHARMAKAYAN SYDÄNOLEMUS

DZOGCHEN MEDITAATION YDINHARJOITUKSET

Toimittanut Anne Brunila

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

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

Pictures: Jitka Polanská, Anne Brunila

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

written by Jitka Polanská



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

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

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

It was in 2015. Yongdzin Rinpoche and Khenpo Rinpoche blessed it with a small ceremony, lighting a butter lamp as a symbol of wisdom to be spread everywhere.
I was thinking about a name and finally decided for *Melong Yeshe.* It means mirror-like wisdom, it is a concept important in the religious context, as one of the five principal wisdoms. A mirror can reflect our face and all things that we put in front of it; similarly, we want to reflect all events and activities that are happening in the monastery throughout the year: rituals, ceremonies, examinations…

Who else besides you is involved?

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

How many articles have you published?

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

Who are your readers?

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


Melong Yeshe´s home page

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

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

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

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

Do you remember your first impression from this continent?

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

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

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



Geshe Samten at Shenten Dargye Ling, summer 2022

What do you like about Shenten?

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

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

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

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

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



Melong Yeshe

Photos: Jitka Polanska

Stéphane: “Speech of Delight” was named by Yongdzin Rinpoche, in those fresh and anarchic times

written by Jitka Polanská



Stéphane Arguillère met Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche in 1992, as a twenty-two year old young man. Later, he became involved in the sangha as it gathered around Shenten and started the Shenten´s newsletter *Speech of Delight* which has transformed into the current magazine. He has translated Yongdzin Rinpoche´s and other lamas´ teachings in past years and now pursues a career as an academic. As Stéphane says in his account, his life has encompassed many challenges but the direction is from dark places to the light, and not vice versa.

First of all, let us speak about the *Speech of Delight*, Stéphane. You and some others started it, right? I have some old issues with me, we can take a look at them together, on the screen. The first one is from 2006, the last one from 2010.

That first one I made myself. I can see some typos (*he laughs*). I do not remember who brought up the idea, but I remember that Yongdzin Rinpoche was very enthusiastic about it. I think we copied a bit of the customs from the Dzogchen community, as there were some people in our sangha who were students of Namhkai Norbu. They had a newsletter in France, how was it called? *Le Chant du coucou – The Song of the Cuckoo*. I think the idea may have been from them. It was a time when there were no websites, I mean dharma centers did not have websites, so some vehicle was needed to distribute information. The frequency, I think, was twice a year.

Speech of Delight

Shenten Dargye Ling Newsletter N°1 May 2006

Introduction by Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche

« First of all, both the personal and spiritual sides are important in keeping our tradition alive and in running this place over a long period of time. This requires a lot, but there is also great benefit in supporting a peaceful, happy atmosphere in such things. »

At the end of the last summer retreat, Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung designated certain people to oversee the various aspects of life at Shenten: Florens Van Canstein (general co-ordinator) ; Jean-Louis Massoubre (advisor) ; Isabelle Catona (secretary) ; Aicha Charmi (treasurer) ; Philippe Renucci (works overseeer) ; Carol and Dima Ermakovi (caretakers, recently replaced by Guillaume Lassalle) Romain Morin (groundsman); Stéphane Arguillère (texts translator) ; Martha Daams (contact for the Netherlands) ; Wolfgang Schmid (contact for Germany) ; Pierre Combraux (tasked with public relations with the press).

Staying at Shenten Dargye Ling

If you'd like to stay at Shenten, it is imperative to contact **Isabelle (0616041682)** and **Guillaume (0241594956)** in advance. Please bring your own bedding (eg sheets and a sleeping bag). **Accommodation** is 10€ per night; or 5€ for those on low income. **Meals :** when the centre provides meals, breakfast will be 1€, lunch 3€ and diner 3€. If you provide some of your food yourself, we would still ask for a minimum contribution of 2€ per day **Transport :** from Saumur: 7€ ; from Longué : 2€.

Works : balance and projects

Responsable : Philippe Renucci

Many large jobs have already been completed: Rinpoche's appartment (bedroom, bathroom, living room and kitchen), the Gompa, 'Khenpo's house', plus the painting of many rooms and the caretaker's flat. External wooden window frames have been repainted and the airy study room has received a new door.

One of the most costly jobs has been renonvating the heating in the château (14000€ approx.). and it has also been necesssary to bring the water purifying system back into good working order (7000€) ; cleaning the rainwater drainage pipes is underway (1800€), as well as the construction of a bathroom for our monks in the West Wing (3000€).

In the near future we hope to repair the roof in the East Wing (12000€) and the installation of a kitchen in line with all legal norms plus a dining hall in the 'Garden Pavillion' are under consideration.

We are also planning to build a dark retreat cabin with two cells. The façade of the West Wing needs to be restored as do the roof supports (80 000€).

Geshés and Teachings

Geshé Gelek and **Geshé Samten** have been resident here in Shenten since the beginning of the year and our first Christmas Retreat was led by Geshe Gelek who gave detailed instructions on Tummo. The last weekend of every month is dedicated to Ngöndro practice and we look forward to more retreats and teaching weekends to be led by our Geshes over the coming months. For up-to-date information, visit our website **www.yungdrung-bon.net**.

Grounds

Responsable : Romain Morin

Various jobs have already been done, a small hedge and other trees have been planted, the courtyard in front of the château has been weeded and some new flower beds created.

Last summer our first vegetable garden was created and this year we have planted up almost the whole of the plot. We've tried to concentrate on 'easy-to grow' vegetables with a high, on-going yield but have also branched out with herbs to enhance our meals and with varieties to try to ensure an abundant supply during retreat times so we can all enjoy organic vegetables at a low cost. We are experimenting with organic gardening techniques.

Guillaume has set up a system of notebooks for logs, advice and memos to enable Anne and other garden helpers to coordinate our efforts. The initial job of getting the garden underway is virtually finished, now it's just a case of weeding, watering and looking forward to a good harvest ! All volounteers welcome.

Contacts : Romain : +33 689122338 ; Anne : **anne-castagne@wanadoo.fr** (+33 621727732) ;
Guillaume : **gf1lassalle@yahoo.fr**.

Karma Yoga

OUR CENTRE CAN ONLY CONTINUE WITH YOUR ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT ! Those coming to work full-time at Shenten (that is, 6 hours a day) will be **housed free of charge** plus part of their meals will be provided by the centre.

Even when Philippe Renucci is not here, volunteers are welcome, particularly for painting and plastering. **Guillaume** can fill you in on the details and all necessary materials will be waiting for you !

Tools and Furniture

Shenten Dargye Ling gladly accepts donations of chairs, tables, bedside tables, chests of drawers, wardrobes, carpets, hoovers and all kinds of tools… …

Shenten Accounts

Responsable : Aicha Charmi

From March 2005 to March 2006, expenditure on **works** amounted to **24 500**€. Outlay for furniture and tools (mattresses, beds etc.) over the same period was **9 200**€. The annual total for **taxes** is around **4 000**€; **1 800**€ was spent on **transport** while **bills** (heating, electricity, telephone, insurance, general maintenence…), came to **22 000**€.

We also spent **1400**€, on **daily expenses and fees**. This brings us to total of around **62 900**€. Current information allows us to estimate that the monthly sum from regular donations is around 1 200€ or 14 400€ per annum. With one-off donations amounting to around **22 000**€ per year plus contributions amounting to **30 000**€ by the Yungdrung Bon Association from retreat incomes we have been able to balance accounts so far. However, this present system does not easily facilitate the establishment of long-term book-keeping forecasts.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE ASSOCIATION YUNGDRUNG BÖN : 5th of AUGUST, 2H30 PM IN SHENTEN.

You also told me that Yongdzin Rinpoche gave it the name.



Yes, it was him and he also made a drawing which was meant to be the logo of the bulletin. His style is quite recognizable in it. It is a vase, you see, a symbol of wealth, like an empowerment vase but without a spout and there was a jewel at the top.

You can also notice a small poem of Rinpoche written in the second issue of the newsletter.

I see, and I see also a shift in the image, a development. Somebody took over the graphical design?

Yes, Christophe got involved. It made the newsletter much nicer, but complicated its edition quite a lot, as new typos and spelling mistakes would pop up as he was managing the text in the layout. He absolutely wanted it to be beautiful, no matter what (*he laughs*).

This is a usual conflict between the graphic designers and content creators, I would say. Who was in the core team of the newsletter, at the beginning?

I think I was responsible for it, but I didn’t do it alone. It was written in English, and I am not a native English speaker. If I remember well, Carol Ermakova helped with it. And we published content that other people prepared. We were asking all the people who were responsible for something to write down a report, a small summary of activities. It was organized like in the Dzogchen community: a group of people was formed and each of them was assigned with different responsibilities. Not much hierarchy. The purpose of the newsletter was to show the people in the community what was happening at Shenten to raise funds and to make them feel Shenten is a common thing. As you see, there is also a call for help in karma yoga.



Speech of Delight

Shenten Dargye Ling's Newsletter N°2 Nov. 2006



Good news and a few words regarding Shenten Dargye Ling



Greetings from Blou! I want to share good news and a few words regarding Shenten Dargye Ling with you. The good news is that Shenten Dargye Ling has now been legally recognized as a religious congregation by the government of the Republic of France. This took place on 30th June, 2006 and marks a new and historical development for the Yungdrung Bön tradition.

Receiving the status of congregation from the French government is a very special opportunity for us. This will surely also be very important for all Bönpos, both inside and outside Tibet. Wherever Bönpos are, they will know about this positive development and feel supported.

The congregation was initiated and established by H.E. Yongdzin Lopön Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche with the inspiration of furthering the critically needed preservation of Yungdrung Bön, the indigenous religious culture of Tibet and one of the most ancient religions still alive in the world today. The support of Mr. Guinness of the Kalpa Group has been great help to us. He supports the preservation of our tradition in many ways and it was thanks to his generous donation that this project was able to get off the ground. I also appreciate our Sangha members for their participation and tremendous supports.

This is a very critical time for the Tibetan religion and culture as regards its future safety, so the new establishment of Shenten Dargye Ling in Blou, a nice French country village with its friendly and courteous people, will be extremely significant for the future of our tradition. Here we expect to develop a hub which will be a vital presence in preserving our religion and culture, a center of education but also a home where practitioners



As for the fundamental root of originating all spiritual and temporal well-being for everyone, There is no means other than to perform virtuous actions. Engaging oneself in supporting and contributing to the development and stability of others' welfare - What good fortune this is!

can enrich their spiritual knowledge and a place where practical aspects of Yungdrung Bön can flourish – medicine, art, and language and so on – alongside major academic and religious activities.

Against this background on behalf of Shenten Dargye Ling, I would like to extend my welcome to all the friends and practitioners of Yungdrung Bön who wish to participate in its endeavors and advancement. At the same time, I also would like to let you know that as a new organization with no financial resources, our Congregation is in need of financial aid to sustain it and to enable us to carry on our programs smoothly.

As for the current program of the Congregation, I would present it in following ways:

1. We have already started a Library consisting of a complete set of the Bönpo Kajur and Katen together with some other collected works. More printed and rare manuscript texts will be gathered and saved here.
2. The main assembly hall (tib. 'du 'khang) with Buddha's statue has been inaugurated and we hope to install a wooden carved traditional altar and a Stupa next year.
3. To create and maintain a Digital and Book archive of teachings given by H.E. Yongdzin Rinpoche in Europe and the U.S. over the last 17 years and other Bön Lamas.
4. Projects regarding Transcription of teachings and Translation of Tibetan texts have also been initiated.
5. Spring, summer, autumn and winter Teaching and practice programs along with additional and weekend programs have already been started in Shenten. As one of the most important instruments of the preservation, this program is to be develop more efficiently in the near future:
   - intensive meditation training program with a view idea to developing a traditional meditation training program
   - to set up programs on Tibetan language and literature
   - Tibetan arts, medicine and healing programs.
6. To conduct scientific, experimental research on specific fields related to this tradition.
7. To convene Academic conferences on the Bön tradition.

These are our current on-going projects. For more information on the events of Shenten Dargye Ling this newsletter, Speech of Delight, will be issued from time to time and additionally, there will a website of Shenten Dargye Ling in the near future. I conclude this message here with my warmest regards and prayers for all of you.

Les responsables désignés par Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung demeurent : Florens Van Canstein (coordinateur) ; Jean-Louis Massoubre (conseiller) ; Isabelle Catona (secrétaire) ; Aïcha Charni (trésorière) ; Martha Daams (correspondante pour les Pays-Bas) ; Wolfgang Schmid (correspondant pour l'Allemagne) ; Philippe Renucci (responsable des travaux) ; Carol et Dima Ermakovi (transcripts anglais) Guillaume Lassalle (gardien) ; Romain Morin (jardin); Stéphane Arguillère (traductions de textes, communications internes) ; Pierre Combroux (relations avec la presse).

Now there is a more cautious approach to call people to stay as volunteers. Help can come with troubles sometimes…

This contradiction was there from the very beginning. And it is something that I saw in many Dharma centers. But there was a great need for help and money just to keep things running. When I was in the administration of Shenten, on the management board, I saw how much money was needed just for regular maintenance, merely to ensure that the structure does not collapse. My idea at that time was to get regular donations from people rather than financing the center through the

teaching fees. I thought that if we made people pay just for teaching sessions, it would not make them feel responsible, they would feel more like consumers. And I also imagined that generosity would come with transparency of our intentions and results.

The first issue was very sober and succinct but then the newsletter started to contain longer articles and stories with pictures, also quite detailed reports of Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche.

As for Khenpo´s letters, yes, we asked him to write one, as we did not want to bother Rinpoche with that, and he was very much willing to do it. Maybe he was less busy than he is now. At the beginning, I made the newsletter very cheap, intentionally, because it was meant to be distributed in paper; but gradually we started to send it through emails and costs decreased, and we could afford to use colors and pictures.

As you can see, in the second issue there is a report about a project of translating chosen Bon texts – which was a project which I initiated. We wanted to raise funds which would enable translators to work on it. But, unfortunately, it did not work.

Do you remember until when you were involved in the newsletter?

Not really. At some point I passed it to someone else, I do not recall when and to whom. You know, the years 2008-2010 were very difficult for me, in many aspects. I faced lots of obstacles and maybe that's why I forgot lots of things from that period. My relationship with the Tibetan things, my professional life, everything went a bit upside down, and also the connection with Shenten loosened. At the beginning, things were very fresh, a bit anarchic and funny in Shenten, and we all were very enchanted with it, and a bit naïve about it. One of the first times when we were sitting with Rinpoche on the bench in the courtyard outside, I told him: "Oh, Rinpoche, I have been through so many Buddhist centers and it was always hell on earth, while here, it is so nice and people are so relaxed and there is such a practice atmosphere!" And Rinpoche laughed at me, saying: "Just wait a little bit and you will see" (*he laughs*). And he was right, of course. With time, it wore me out somehow and finally, I used to come only to translate. I think that the last time I came, as an interpreter, it was for His Holiness the 33rd Menri Trizin, when he visited Shenten in 2010. Khenpo Rinpoche asked me, he needed someone who could translate directly from Tibetan into both French and English.



You were already so good in Tibetan?

I started learning Tibetan when I was eighteen, in 1988, and I was forty at that time. I was already good enough in Tibetan when I met Yongdzin Rinpoche in 1992 to discuss in Tibetan with him. Actually, my spoken Tibetan was better when I was thirty than now, because I do not use it very much. My classical Tibetan is good, I can read texts fluently and my understanding of Tibetan lamas when they are teaching is ok, but I do not get much practice these days in talking. Speaking about modern life is especially difficult. I would not be able to say something like: "Go to the website and download that file", I have no clue about some of these modern words.

Maybe they say "website" and "download", I would not be surprised.

Yes, my colleague at the Institute of Eastern Languages (Inalco) in Paris keeps correcting Tibetans. She has an amazing vocabulary in modern spoken Tibetan, and she teaches them all the neologisms that are used in Lhasa.

When lamas speak Tibetan, do you understand some of them more easily than others?

Definitely, Khenpo Rinpoche is very easy to understand, he speaks the common language of the Tibetans in exile, with much less regional accent than, let us say, Khenpo Gelek or Geshe Samten – geshe la has a really strong accent from Rinpoche´s native region, Khyungpo. I also translated for the latter lamas, but I had to make an effort. Translating Khenchen Rinpoche is very easy, instead.

You said you met Yongdzin Rinpoche in 1992. Was it at Triten Norbutse?

Yes. And then, I returned to Triten only in 1998. And it had already grown a lot.

How was the monastery in 1992?

It is a bit difficult to describe, because the few old buildings are still there, but they are sort of completely taken into the extended structure. It was already a busy place and very much in the process of building. But below the monastery there were only rice fields, no city, only a few houses around the Swayambhu hill. The flat part between the Swayambhu stupa and Triten, which is now filled with houses, was just open countryside. I remember that when I was visiting, the taxi dropped me at the Swayambhu hill and I had to walk through all those rice fields for more than half an hour. There were little walls made of ground between the fields and I remember myself walking on them to the monastery.



You were a student of Tibetan language and culture at the university at that time?

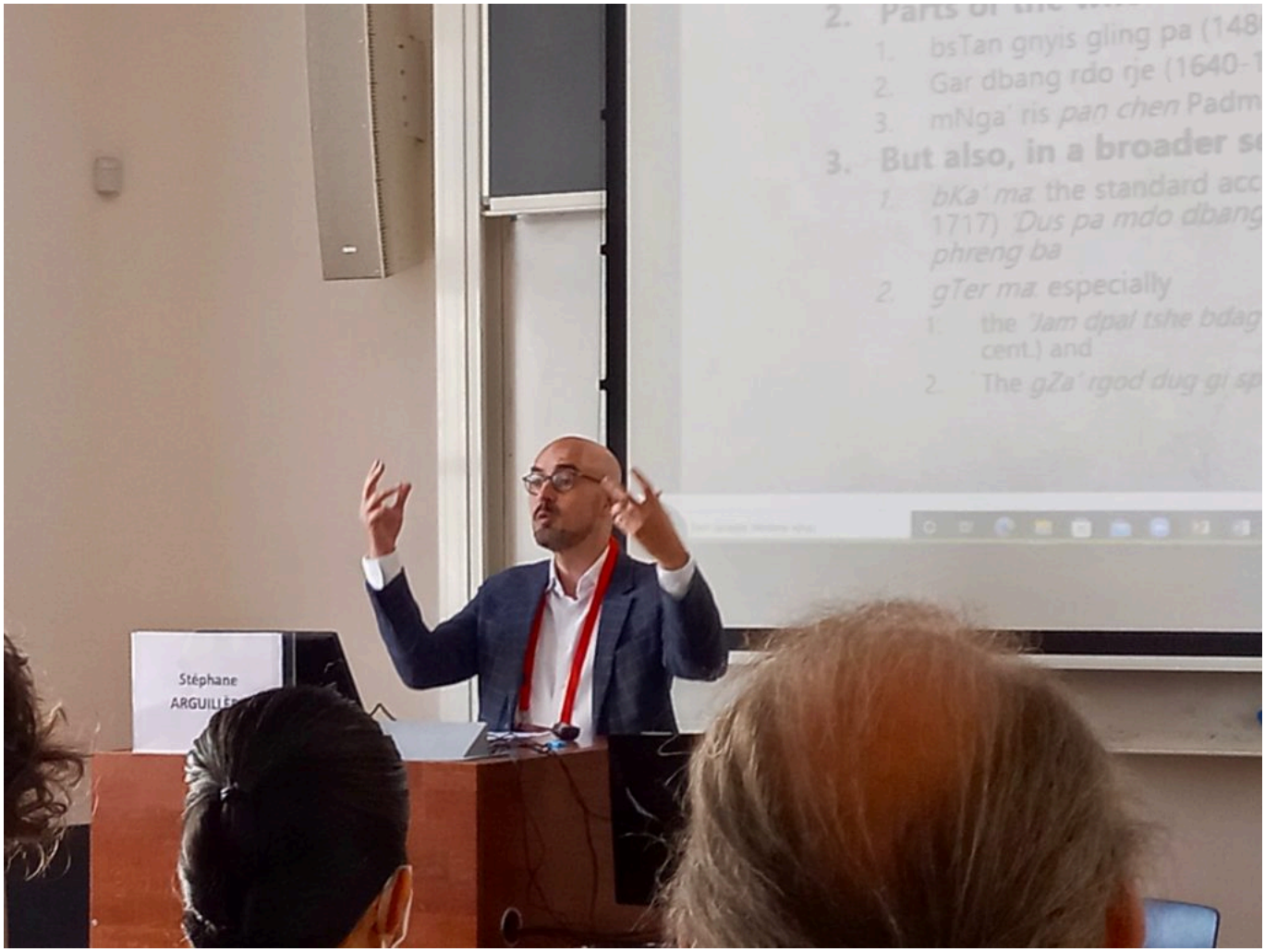
Yes, in 1992 I basically completed my studies in both Western philosophy and Tibetan language and civilization. I learned Tibetan very quickly because my first master, Nyoshül Khenpo (a Nyingma lama) told me, when I was seventeen: “You cannot speak Tibetan, I do not speak English, if you do not learn Tibetan, I will not teach you.” So I learned as you can do when you are only eighteen, it becomes your only obsession. After five years, I got the French highest teaching degree (“agrégation”) in philosophy, which granted me to get a civil servant position as a highschool teacher automatically. But in those days I was not interested in any such thing. I wanted to become a

monk and practice under the guidance of my masters. So, in 1992, I went to Nepal, waiting to get an invitation for Bhutan where my teacher, Nyoshül Khenpo, lived, but it did not work as I expected, and actually, that trip was a failure – or rather, things occurred in a completely different way than what I had imagined. For example, this was the first time in my life that I came in contact with Bon masters and monks, which was then just a mere curiosity for me.

You mentioned obstacles and crises several times, but my impression is that you are a very happy person now. Is this correct?

Yes, it has gotten better and better. I was one of those young men who thought that if they do not achieve things by the time they are thirty, they will never achieve anything at all. I went through very bitter things, and at some point I must admit I lost hope. I got a very clear prophecy from another of my Nyingma masters, Chimed Rigdzin Rinpoche, that I would become "a big professor", as he said in his weird English – he even specified it very precisely, and it would be a quite strong position on Tibetan religions in France. But my own desire was only to receive the instructions and then to put them into practice, and I had no serious appetite for an academic career at that time; and later on, I resigned myself to this prophecy, as it has been so long in coming, I thought it would never come true. I was never properly supported in French tibetology and even ended up facing many serious obstacles, hostilities, in my thirties and early forties. At some point, I told Yongdzin Rinpoche that I was so fed up with all that, as it was so depressing, that I wanted to drop it all and focus on practice. But he told me: "No no, don´t. If you don't get the title you deserve," he said, "however interesting the things you are saying or writing may be, people will not take them seriously."

Then, I somehow persevered, as I could. Now, at last, my career has become more successful, as I am an associate professor in Tibetan language and civilization, expecting to be promoted to a full professor soon, plus, for example, I run a collective research project on the history of the "Northern Treasures" branch of the Nyingma school, financed by a generous grant from the French National Research Agency. I am also responsible for the training of the French high school philosophy teachers so as to enable them to teach non-Western philosophers, including the Buddhist author Nāgārjuna. Now, I can let go of all the bitter things of the past. I enjoy the present because it is so unusual for me that everything goes so smoothly (*he laughs*). The only thing I could complain about is that I am working little bit too much – but, basically, it is my fault.



Do you still feel a part of Shenten´s community, or any other community, for that sake?

These days, I am making stronger and stronger connections with the branch of Nyingma school called the "Northern treasures", which is also my research topic. But I still feel at home in Shenten, even if I am not coming that often anymore. I have a very good relationship with Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche – I would say it is a friendship. We get along very well, anyway. I think he was a bit disappointed that I left suddenly, at some point. I surely did too much for a long time, and then suddenly dropped everything because I was mentally exhausted. Khenpo la does not surely blame me, but I think it saddened him, with the idea that I was abandoning Yongdzin Rinpoche. But, when it happened, my overall situation was really too heavy for me. Yongdzin Rinpoche somehow perceived it himself. Just before everything collapsed on my head, I met him in Paris to interpret for one of his teachings, and then he gave me, very discreetly, as a monk, a bottle of Polish vodka with golden leaves in it, saying with a smile: "Maybe you will need it". I actually made lots of offerings to the Protectors with that alcohol, and even drank a part of it, but, though it was a bit of a consolation, it was not enough to cope with all the obstacles at that time. A very sweet attention anyway.

Maybe, after all, those moments when everything falls apart and you lose hope and orientation are also part of the path, especially for us Westerners, who come to the Tibetan teachings with quite a lot of unrealistic expectations. Maybe it starts becoming serious only when you have got rid of all these expectations and still get back to it, with a fresher mind, "devoid of both hope and fear," as it is said in the Chö teachings as well as in Dzogchen.

Photo credit: *Stéphane Arguillère*

Éducation, valeurs, dignité ! Une école où la modernité se mêle à la tradition

written by Jitka Polanská



Lorsque les familles des villages reculés des montagnes de l'Himalaya envoient leurs enfants dans un monastère, cela ne signifie pas nécessairement qu'elles veulent qu'ils deviennent moines. Elles le font parce que le monastère éduquera les enfants dans leur langue maternelle et gratuitement. Le fondateur du monastère de Triten Norbutse à Katmandou, S.E. Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche, a accordé un refuge à de nombreux enfants mais il a toujours pensé qu'il serait préférable pour eux d'aller dans une véritable école, une école qui leur donnerait une éducation moderne mais qui transmettrait aussi les valeurs traditionnelles significatives de leurs communautés. Voici l'histoire d'une telle école.

(l'article original en anglais est ICI)

Les dures conditions climatiques, la pauvreté, le manque d'infrastructures, d'éducation et soins de santé – tout cela rend la vie des personnes qui vivent dans l'Himalaya difficile, voire douloureuse parfois. Des communautés parlant des dialectes tibétains ont vécu dans les montagnes pendant des siècles, mais aujourd'hui, toutes les familles qui en ont les moyens envoient leurs enfants dans des pensionnats éloignés pour les aider à avoir un meilleur avenir grâce à l'éducation. Cependant, beaucoup de ces pensionnats n'enseignent pas la langue et la culture tibétaines et les enfants grandissent déconnectés de leur langue maternelle et des traditions qui ont élevé leur peuple au fil

des siècles. Ils peuvent même s’éloigner de leurs propres parents et de leurs proches.



Ils partent en voyage…

Un grand nombre de familles ne peuvent pas se permettre de payer des frais de scolarité et gardent leurs enfants avec elles dans les villages. Mais, les écoles locales des régions de montagne ont un niveau d’enseignement très faible et ne font pas référence au contexte culturel et linguistique de la population tibétaine. Les enfants de ces familles vont probablement connaître le même cycle de difficultés et de lutte à vie que leurs parents.

Une autre option éducative pour les familles vivant dans les hautes altitudes de l’Himalaya est d’envoyer leurs enfants dans un monastère. Les monastères acceptent les enfants gratuitement et les éduquent dans leur propre langue. Toutefois, le curriculum monastique est axé sur les sujets traditionnels et sur les valeurs spirituelles et culturelles, et n’incluent pas d’éducation séculière moderne. En outre, la plupart des enfants ne sont pas enclins à aller dans un monastère.



Life of the people of the Himalayas is hard.



Le monastère de Triten Norbutse, à Katmandou, reçoit fréquemment des demandes de parents qui souhaitent y accueillir leurs enfants. Son fondateur, S.E. Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoché, a

donné refuge à beaucoup de ces enfants, mais il a toujours pensé qu'il serait préférable pour eux d'aller à l'école, une école qui leur donnerait une éducation moderne mais qui leur transmettrait aussi les valeurs traditionnelles significatives de leur communauté.

Le disciple de Yongdzin Rinpoché et l'actuel abbé de Triten Norbutse, Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoché, a pris l'initiative de construire une telle école, qui est devenue sa mission à long terme.



C'est devenu sa mission de longue durée…



Le choix d’un lieu

À cette fin, en 2007, la Sherig Phuntsok Ling Bon Society, l’organisation fondatrice de l’école, a été enregistrée au Bengale occidental, un État situé dans le nord-est de l’Inde. La même année, une parcelle de terrain a été acquise à Siliguri, la capitale du Bengale occidental. La ville a été choisie pour son accès relativement facile aux différents coins de l’Himalaya, étant proche de Sikkim, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, et à seulement quarante minutes de route de la frontière avec le Népal. Le Bhoutan n’est qu’à cent cinquante kilomètres de là et il faut moins d’une journée, en voiture, pour se rendre à Katmandou, où réside la communauté monastique de Triten Norbutse.

Un autre point fort est que Siliguri est très diversifiée sur le plan ethnique, culturel et linguistique. “C’est un melting-pot de la région et elle est devenue un important centre culturel. Nous avons pensé qu’elle pourrait offrir de bonnes opportunités d’éducation pour nos élèves, une fois qu’ils ont fini l’école”, dit Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung.

Il a fallu de nombreuses années avant que des fonds suffisants soient collectés et que la construction de l’école commence, en 2016. Les architectes d’une société basée en France, Architecture et Dévelopment, ont été impliqués dans la planification. Avec des professionnels locaux, ils ont conçu une structure respectueuse de l’environnement et résistante aux tremblements de terre. Des matériaux naturels comme le bambou et les pierres locales ont été utilisés dans certaines parties de la construction. Le premier bâtiment de l’école comprenait des salles de classe, une cuisine, une salle à manger et de méditation, une bibliothèque, des dortoirs séparés pour les garçons et les filles, plusieurs salles pour le personnel, un petit dispensaire, ainsi que des toilettes et des salles de bain.



Le premier bâtiment scolaire a été prêt à la toute fin de l'année 2017.

L'ouverture de la nouvelle école a été annoncée grâce aux relations que l'équipe de l'école avait dans les montagnes. " De plus, deux membres de l'équipe se sont rendus dans des villages éloignés et y ont diffusé la nouvelle ", explique Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung.

Ainsi, entre janvier et mars 2018, environ soixante-dix enfants provenant de différentes régions de l'Himalaya de l'Inde et du Népal sont arrivés et se sont installés dans le pensionnat. La plupart d'entre eux appartiennent à des familles économiquement et socialement vulnérables dont les valeurs et le contexte culturel sont ancrés dans le bouddhisme et le Bon, une ancienne tradition spirituelle très fortement présente dans les montagnes au cours des siècles passés. L'école est gratuite pour tous les enfants.


Entre janvier et mars 2018, le premier groupe d'enfants s'est installé dans l'école.

Tise Himalayan International School (THIS), comme l'école est appelée, a officiellement commencé avec quatre classes en avril 2018, lorsque la nouvelle année scolaire commence habituellement au Bengale occidental. "Tout s'est déroulé sans problème. J'ai été impressionnée par la bonne organisation", déclare Christine Trachte de Yungdrung Bon Stiftung, une fondation allemande qui soutient l'école depuis le tout début.

La direction de l'école a été confiée au président de la Sherig Phuntsok Ling Bon Society, le Vénérable Sonam Norbu, qui, au cours des quatorze années précédentes, avait été responsable de l'auberge et de l'enseignement de la langue et de la culture tibétaines dans l'école de Lubra au Mustang. Au début, son équipe pédagogique de base comprenait un directeur et quatre enseignants. Deux d'entre eux enseignent la langue et la culture tibétaines.

Le programme de l'école est tout à fait unique. Il répond aux normes éducatives requises par le gouvernement du Bengale-Occidental et le Conseil central de l'enseignement secondaire, mais il est enrichi d'éléments de l'art, de la culture et de l'histoire des régions himalayennes et met l'accent sur la conscience environnementale et le respect de la nature typiques de la spiritualité traditionnelle.









Lecture, écriture, mathématiques, méditation et yoga tibétain, connexion à la nature.

“Nous avons travaillé en étroite collaboration avec Khenpo Tenpa Rinpoché et Sherig Phuntsok Ling

Bon Society pour définir la valeur ajoutée de l'école, en réfléchissant à la manière d'unir une approche scientifique rigoureuse de l'éducation et le riche bagage traditionnel de la culture himalayenne. Nous avons eu de nombreuses réunions à ce sujet", raconte Mara Arizaga. Elle est l'un des fondateurs d'EVA (Enlightened Vision Association), une organisation à but non lucratif basée en Suisse qui se concentre principalement sur la préservation de l'héritage culturel de l'Himalaya et qui, depuis de nombreuses années, aide l'école de diverses manières.

L'école a une approche holistique de l'éducation, impliquant le corps, la parole et l'esprit des élèves dans l'apprentissage. Elle donne l'occasion aux enfants de pratiquer le sport et la danse, ainsi que le yoga traditionnel himalayen. Les élèves sont initiés à la méditation et sont naturellement exposés aux valeurs spirituelles traditionnelles que sont l'empathie, la générosité et l'ouverture du cœur.





De temps en temps, les enfants partent en voyage.

Un visiteur de l’école peut voir des enfants pleins de vie et de confiance dans un environnement chaleureux et coloré. Bien qu’ils soient éloignés de leurs parents pendant de longues périodes et qu’ils ne puissent souvent pas leur rendre visite, même pendant les vacances, ils savent que c’est l’occasion pour eux de montrer tout leur potentiel. Cela les aide à surmonter le mal du pays.


L’internat et les frais de scolarité sont gratuits pour tous les enfants.

Afin de maintenir les liens avec leur terre natale, THIS a également produit ses propres manuels d’apprentissage du tibétain avec des histoires qui présentent aux enfants les personnalités, les montagnes ou les rivières des régions dont ils sont originaires. Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung a formé une équipe de personnes qui ont recherché et collecté ces histoires et créé des textes basés sur celles-ci.

Parfois, des parents viennent visiter l’école. Vieillis prématurément par le dur labeur, et ressemblant davantage à des grands-parents, ils sont visiblement émus de voir leurs enfants s’épanouir dans une vie dont ils n’auraient jamais pu rêver pour eux-mêmes.



Les parents voient des enfants pleins de vie



à la poursuite de leurs rêves.

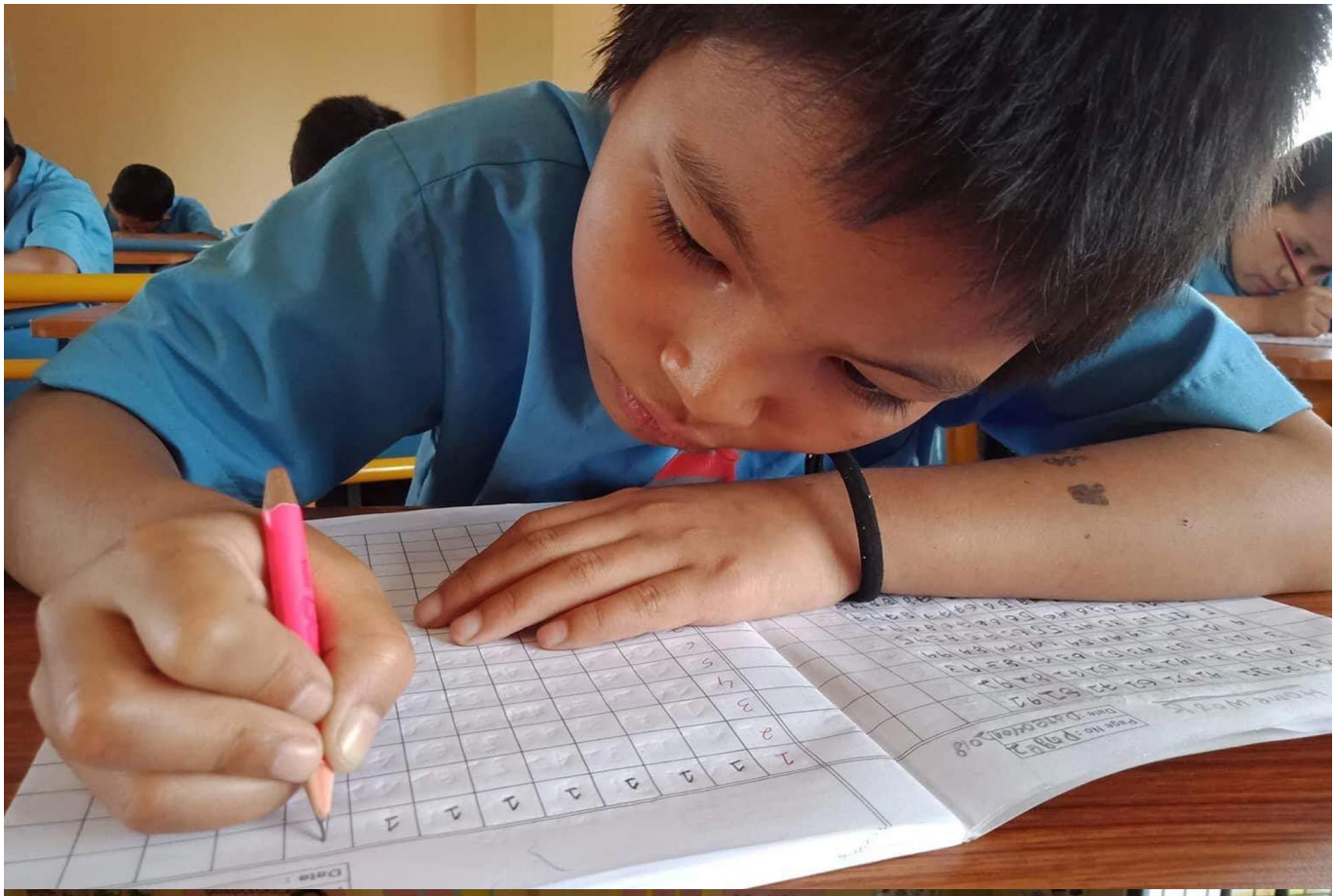
La voie difficile

Actuellement, THIS compte sept classes et dispense un enseignement à 138 enfants, dont la moitié sont des filles. Promouvoir l'égalité des chances pour les filles est l'un des objectifs de l'école. Onze enseignants, une nounou et un cuisinier s'occupent des enfants. En outre, quatre membres de la société Sherig Phuntsok Ling Bon travaillent pour le bien-être général des enfants, gérant également l'administration de l'école et réalisant des projets liés à l'extension et au développement des bâtiments scolaires.

L'école ne reçoit aucune aide financière du gouvernement et ne perçoit pas de frais de scolarité, ce qui signifie qu'elle dépend entièrement des donateurs. Sa viabilité financière est un grand défi, mais Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung est intransigeant dans son objectif de maintenir le haut niveau de l'école. "Les écoles de charité comme la nôtre ne peuvent parfois pas offrir la meilleure éducation par manque de fonds, mais nous voulons être une école exceptionnelle quoi qu'il arrive", dit-il. "Abaisser la qualité serait humiliant pour les enfants et leur dignité est très importante pour moi. Je veux que l'école leur donne la certitude qu'ils sont aussi bons que n'importe qui d'autre et parfaits comme ils sont", affirme Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung.

Il est lui-même un donateur, donnant à l'école tout ce qu'il reçoit en tant qu'enseignant du dharma, et il travaille sans relâche pour augmenter les dons, envoyant des demandes de financement, suivant chaque opportunité qui se présente. Les personnes de la société Sherig Phuntsok Ling Bon, la fondation allemande Yungdrung Bon Stiftung et l'organisation suisse EVA le soutiennent dans ses efforts, tout comme d'autres organisations et individus. Pourtant, les fonds ne sont pas suffisants pour le moment. "Nous sommes toujours en équilibre sur le fil du rasoir", déclare Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung.







TL’école dispense un enseignement égal aux filles et aux garçons.

L’une des priorités qu’il mentionne est d’augmenter les salaires des enseignants et de leur donner des contrats de travail plus stables afin qu’ils ressentent moins d’incertitude. Les salaires que l’école peut se permettre de verser pour le moment sont encore loin d’être attractifs.

Il est également urgent de finaliser la construction du deuxième bâtiment, une structure de trois étages commencée en 2020. Il contient quinze salles de classe, des bureaux et des espaces de travail pour les enseignants, ainsi que des toilettes. Plus de la moitié du coût a déjà été payé et l’entreprise de construction continue de travailler avec la promesse d’être payée lorsque d’autres finances seront disponibles.

L’école a également besoin d’un nouveau dortoir pour les filles afin de pouvoir inscrire davantage d’enfants, jusqu’à la pleine capacité de 300 élèves, 150 garçons et 150 filles, avec une moyenne de 25 enfants par classe, et 12 classes au total. L’école vise à couvrir un enseignement secondaire complet.

Enfin, à l’avenir, le souhait de Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung est de construire une petite clinique sur le terrain de l’école. Cet établissement de soins aurait une double fonction – prendre soin de la santé de la communauté de l’ école et aussi préserver et développer la science médicale traditionnelle de l’ Himalaya.

“Les connaissances médicales himalayennes et la tradition de respect de la nature ont peut-être un mot à dire dans le monde actuel qui est confronté à des déséquilibres et à une dégradation importante de l’environnement”, déclare Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung.

Il estime que l’école ne profitera pas seulement aux enfants, mais qu’elle aura également une influence positive sur le monde qui les entoure. “Où qu’ils aillent par la suite, quelle que soit leur carrière dans la vie, les valeurs qui leur ont été enseignées resteront avec eux”, pense-t-il.



Accueil de Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung



qui visitait l’école en octobre 2022.



Le souhait de S.E. Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoché pour les enfants est de leur offrir une éducation moderne combinée aux valeurs traditionnelles de leurs communautés.

Photos : archives de Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche, Jitka Polanská, Darek Sawczuk

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Education, values, dignity! A school where modernity blends with tradition

written by Jitka Polanská



When families from remote villages of the Himalayan mountains send their children to a monastery, it does not necessarily mean that they want them to become monks. They do so also because the monastery will educate children in their native tongue and it will be free of charge. The founder of Triten Norbutse monastery in Kathmandu, H.E. Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche, has granted a refuge to many children but he has always felt it would be good for many of them to go to a proper school, a school which would give them a modern education but also transmit the meaningful traditional values of their communities. Here is a story of such a school.

Harsh climate conditions, poverty, lack of infrastructure, education and healthcare – all this makes the life of the people who live in the Himalayas difficult, even painful at times. Communities speaking Tibetan dialects have lived in the mountains for centuries, but now all families who have the means send their children to distant boarding schools to help them have a better future through education. Many of these boarding schools, though, do not teach the Tibetan language and culture

and the children grow up disconnected from their mother tongue and from the traditions which have uplifted their people throughout the centuries. They may even become alienated from their own parents and relatives.



They set out on a journey…

A large number of families cannot afford to pay any tuition fees and keep their children with them in the villages. But the mountain regions' local schools have very poor teaching standards and do not refer to the native cultural and linguistic background of the Tibetan speaking population. Children from those families are probably going to experience the same cycle of hardships and life-long struggle as their parents.

Another educational option for families living in the high altitudes of the Himalayas is to send their children to a monastery. Monasteries accept children free of charge and educate them in their own language. However, a monastic curriculum is focused on traditional subjects and spiritual and cultural values and does not include a modern, secular education. Also, most children are not inclined to go to a monastery.



Life of the people of the Himalayas is hard.



Triten Norbutse monastery in Kathmandu receives frequent requests from parents to take their children in. Its founder, H.E. Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche has granted refuge to many of

those children but he always felt it would be better for them to go to school, a school which would give them a modern education but also transmit the meaningful traditional values of their communities.

Yongdzin Rinpoche´s disciple and the current abbot of Triten Norbutse Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche took it upon himself to build such a school, and it has become his long lasting mission.



It has become his long lasting mission…



The choice of a place

For this purpose, in 2007, Sherig Phuntsok Ling Bon Society, the founding organization of the school, was registered in West Bengal, a state in the northeast part of India. A parcel of land was acquired in the same year in Siliguri, the capital of West Bengal. The city was chosen for having relatively easy access to different corners of the Himalayas, being close to Sikkim, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and only forty minutes drive from the border with Nepal. Bhutan is only one hundred fifty kilometers from there and it takes less than one day, traveling by car, to get to Kathmandu, where the monastic community of Triten Norbutse resides.

Another strong point is that Siliguri is ethnically, culturally, and linguistically very diverse. “It is a melting pot of the area and it has become an important cultural center. We thought it would offer good educational opportunities to our students, once they finished the school,” Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung says.

It took many years before sufficient funds were collected and the construction of the first building of the school started, in 2016. Architects from a France-based company Architecture et Dévelopment were involved in the planning. Together with local professionals, they designed an environmentally friendly and earthquake resistant structure. Natural materials like bamboo and local stones were used in some parts of the construction. The first building of the school included classrooms, a kitchen, a dining and meditation room, a library, separate dormitories for boys and girls, several staff rooms, a small dispensary, and toilets and bathrooms.



The first school building was ready at the very end of 2017.

The opening of the new school was announced through the connections that the school team had in the mountains. “Also, two members of the team traveled to remote villages and spread the news there,” Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung says.

As a result, between January and March of 2018, around seventy children from different parts of the Himalayas of India and Nepal arrived and settled in the boarding school. Most of them belong to economically and socially vulnerable families whose values and cultural background are rooted in Buddhism and Bon, an ancient spiritual tradition very strongly present in the mountains in the past centuries. The school is free of charge for all the children.


Between January and March of 2018 the first group of children settled in the school.

Modern, yet traditional

Tise Himalayan International School (THIS), as the school is called, officially started with four classes in April 2018, when the new school year usually begins in West Bengal. "Everything went very smoothly. I was impressed by the good organization," says Christine Trachte from Yungdrung Bon Stiftung, a German foundation which has supported the school since the very beginning.

Entrusted with leading the school was the President of Sherig Phuntsok Ling Bon Society, Ven. Sonam Norbu, who, in the previous fourteen years, had been responsible for the hostel and teaching Tibetan language and culture in the school in Lubra in Mustang. In the beginning, his core pedagogical team included a headmaster and four teachers. Two of them teach Tibetan language and culture.

The school's curriculum is quite unique. It meets the educational standards required by the government of West Bengal and the Central Board of Secondary Education, but it is enriched with elements of the art, culture, and history of the Himalayan regions and emphasizes the environmental awareness and respect for nature typical of the traditional spirituality.









Reading, writing, math, meditation and Tibetan Yoga, connection to nature.

“We worked very closely with Khenpo Tenpa Rinpoche and Sherig Phuntsok Ling Bon Society to

define the added value of the school, thinking of how to unite a rigorous scientific approach to the education and the rich traditional background of the Himalayan culture. We had so many meetings about it," Mara Arizaga says. She is one of the founders of EVA (Enlightened Vision Association), a non-for- profit organization based in Switzerland that focuses mainly on the preservation of the cultural heritage of the Himalayas and for many years, has been helping the school in various ways.

The school has a holistic approach to education, engaging students´ body, speech and mind in the learning. It gives opportunities for children to practice sports and dance, as well as traditional Himalayan yoga. Students are introduced to meditation and naturally exposed to the traditional spiritual values of empathy, generosity, and open heartedness.





Occasionally, children go on trips…

A visitor to the school can see lively and self-confident children. Although they are far away from their parents for long periods and often cannot visit them even during the holidays, they know that this is a great opportunity for them to display all their potential. This helps them overcome homesickness.



Boarding and tuition is free for all the children.

To keep their connections with their homeland alive, THIS produced its own textbooks for learning Tibetan with stories which introduce children to personalities, mountains, or rivers of the areas they come from. Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung formed a team of people who researched and collected those stories and created texts based on them.

Sometimes, parents come to visit the school. Aged prematurely by hard labor, they are visibly moved to see their children blossoming into a life they could never have dreamt of for themselves.



Parents see lively and self-confident children



pursuing their dreams.

The hard way

Currently, THIS has seven classes and provides education for 138 children, half of them girls. Promoting equal opportunities for girls is one of the objectives of the school. Eleven teachers, a nanny, and a cook take care of the children. In addition, four members of Sherig Phuntsok Ling Bon Society work for the overall welfare of the children, managing also the school´s administration and carrying out projects related to the extension and development of school buildings.

The school neither receives governmental financial support, nor collects any tuition fees which means it is completely dependent on donors. Its financial sustainability is a big challenge, but Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung is uncompromising in his objective to keep the high standard of the school. “Charity schools like ours sometimes cannot offer the best education because they lack funds, but we want to be an outstanding school no matter what,” he says. “Lowering standards would be humiliating for children and their dignity is very important to me. I want the school to give them certainty that they are as good as anyone else and perfect as they are,” Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung says.

He himself is a donor, giving all he receives as a dharma teacher to the school and he has been tirelessly working to increase donations, sending out applications for funding, following up every opportunity that arises. People from Sherig Phuntsok Ling Bon Society, the German Foundation Yungdrung Bon Stiftung, and the Swiss organization EVA support him in his efforts, as do other organizations and individuals. Still, funding is not sufficient for the moment. “We are always balancing on the edge,” Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung says.





The school educates girls and boys equally.

One of the priorities he mentions is to increase the teachers' salaries and give them more stable work contracts so that they feel less uncertainty. The salaries that the school can afford to pay at the moment are still far from being attractive.

There is also an urgent need to finalize the construction of the second building, a three-story structure started in 2020. It contains fifteen classrooms, teachers' offices and working space, and toilets. More than a half of the cost has already been paid and the construction company continues to work with the promise of being paid when more finances become available.

The school also needs a new dormitory for girls so that more children can be enrolled, up to the full capacity of 300 students, 150 boys and 150 girls, with an average of 25 children per class, and 12 grades altogether. The school aims to cover a complete secondary education.

In the future, Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung´s wish is to build a small clinic on the school' s property. The healthcare facility would have a double function – taking care of the health of the school's community and also preserving and developing the traditional medical science of the Himalayas.

"The Himalayan medical knowledge and the tradition of respect for nature may have a word to say in the present world which is facing imbalances and extensive environmental degradation," says Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung.

He believes that the school will not only benefit the children but also have a positive influence on the world around them. "Wherever they go afterwards, whatever life career they pursue, the values they have been taught will stay with them," he says.



Welcoming Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung



visiting the school in October 2022.



H.E. Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche´s wish for the children has been a modern education combined with the traditional values of their communities.

Photos: archives of Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche, Jitka Polanská, Darek Sawczuk
(After having read this article, some readers asked us about how to help. If you have the same question, look HERE.)

What is inside a Bon Stupa? Lama Sangye Monlam explains

written by Jitka Polanská



Lama Sangye Monlam, former resident Lama of Shenten Dargye Ling, and his student Sophie Frisch built a Stupa in Yeshe Sal Ling, Lama Sangye's center in Austria, honoring a wish of Yongdzin Rinpoche. In the summer of 2022, Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche and other lamas came for the consecration ceremony which was originally planned for May 2020 but had to be postponed because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

When and why did you start planning to build a Stupa at Yeshe Sal Ling?

LS: Originally, we wanted to build just a sang-khang (a hearth for the sang ritual) in the form of a Stupa, and we ordered a finial for it from Nepal with the "horns of the bird" as is used for Stupas. Yongdzin Rinpoche saw this ornament and said that we should build a Stupa, and we followed his suggestion. The inauguration of Yeshe Sal Ling by Yongdzin Rinpoche was in 2015 and this was some time after, so the decision to build a Stupa must have been made in 2016.

You have a Stupa now, but no sang-khang?

LS: That´s true, but we are starting to build one now.

Comparing the Stupa at Yeshe Sal Ling with the two Stupas of Shenten – what is the size?

LS: It is somewhere in between the sizes of Shenten´s Stupas. It is a bit smaller than the higher one and a bit higher than the smaller one. (Note: there is one meter difference between the Stupas in Shenten.)



The Stupa in Yeshe Sal Ling

How did you proceed from idea to realization? Did you follow a drawing of a model Stupa?

LS: There is a description of a Yungdrung Koeleg Stupa in the texts, and a drawing by Yongdzin Rinpoche based on the description. The main principle is that the size of each part of the Stupa is expressed as a multiple of a unit. The unit varies. For practical purposes, it is usually chosen to be a multiple of the height of a layer of bricks.

SF: Our unit was around twenty centimeters, corresponding to one layer of bricks lying flat (6.5cm) plus another layer of bricks standing on edge (12cm) plus two layers of cement.

You called Dorje, a French practitioner who led the building of the second Stupa at Shenten, to organize and supervise the construction in Yeshe Sal Ling, is that correct?

LS: Yes, Dorje had already assisted A'u Norbu with the construction of the first Stupa at Shenten, constructed two smaller Stupas outside Shenten independently, and then led a team of volunteers who built the second of Shenten´s Stupas. He had become a very competent Stupa builder. With his experience and the help of volunteers the construction of Yeshe Sal Ling's Stupa went very smoothly, without any obstacles.

SF: We were very lucky with Dorje and also with the volunteers, who came from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands, as well as from Austria. They were very skillful and hard-working and built the Stupa in around three months in the spring of 2019.

Stupas are filled with consecrated and blessed ritual objects; can you give some details about what is in your Stupa?

LS: Yes, there is a large number of objects inside the Stupa on different levels. The concrete base contains a triangular hole. Into this hole the three harmful emotions are banished. Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche placed there a drawing of three animals representing three mental poisons: a snake for anger, a bird for desire and a pig for stupidity.

Then, the lower part of the Stupa consists of five steps, representing the five elements. Above the steps, there is a straight part, and inside, a vase dedicated to Nampar Gyalwa (an emanation of Tonpa Shenrab), containing his mantra, grains and various medicines. The vase is surrounded by other offerings, like food, and by many boxes full of tsa-tsas (tiny Stupas molded from clay, painted with gold colour).

SF: While the treasures on this level are mostly of a worldly nature, the higher we go, the more elevated states are represented by the content of the Stupa.

LS: Above the straight part there is a platform, and inside it are mantras and images representing the protectors of Bon, like Yeshe Walmo, Mibdue, Nypangse, Menmo, etc., and also offerings for the five senses (butter lamps, incense, water, flowers, food), and tormas.

SF: Lama Sangye himself made large tormas from clay and decorated them with flower shaped ornaments, beautiful to see (but now invisible).

LS: Above the platform there are four more steps, symbolizing the Four Immeasurables: immeasurable compassion, love, joy, and equanimity.

Inside, we placed what is perhaps the greatest treasure of the Stupa: petchas (Tibetan loose leaf books) forming a complete set of the Bon Kanjur. As we were wrapping the petchas, Ponlop Tsangpa Rinpoche was just giving teachings in Yeshe Sal Ling and he helped with the wrapping of the petchas and performed one of the consecration ceremonies that mark the completion of each layer of the Stupa.

At the center of the Stupa there is the "tree of life", an octagonal wooden pillar. This pillar, originally almost as high as the Stupa, is cut into two parts. The short part is inserted in the lower part of the Stupa, and the long part runs from the platform up to the top of the Stupa. Each part is wrapped in many kilometers of mantras, and then in khatags of five different colors.

Then, above the four steps is the bumpa (vase) of the Stupa, there is a niche facing east with a statue of Tonpa Shenrab visible through a window. Inside the closed part of the bumpa, there are small clay reliefs of Yidams, copies of Yangtse Longchen and Zhang Zhung Nyen Gyud, and other offerings, for instance, a piece of meteorite iron given by Yongdzin Rinpoche.





Lama Sangye Monlam

How did you get materials for the Stupa?

SF: You mean the material that we just mentioned? We ordered the Kanjur from Tengchen monastery in Tibet and various medicines from Nepal. Food and other offerings could be found here.

And what about construction materials?

SF: We used the bricks and cement common in Austria. For the tree of life, we bought a tree for two hundred Euro, and a carpenter who is a Buddhist cut it into shape for free. That was kind of him. The price quoted by a professional carpenter was around a thousand Euro: unaffordable.

Do you know the total cost of the Stupa, and can you share it?

SF: I lost track of the cost completely, but it was a large amount of money. Fortunately, the expenses could be spread out over a longer period of time. Everything that went inside was ordered and paid for in the course of several years before the start of the construction.

When was the Stupa finished, in all its parts?

LS: In the summer of 2019. We wanted to have the consecration soon after and planned it for the spring of 2020 but then the first wave of covid prevented it. In 2021, we had to postpone the consecration again, for the same reason.

SF: Lama Sangye performed a small consecration ceremony shortly after completion. The Stupa was properly consecrated, but there was no celebration with many Lamas and guests until 2022. In 2022, Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche had time to come to Yeshe Sal Ling and the covid situation was not so bad in the summer, so we decided to have the big consecration ceremony in July 2022. On the occasion, Khenchen Rinpoche gave a Namdak initiation. He was assisted by Geshe Samten Tsukphu and Geshe Lungrig (whom you know from Shenten), Geshe Sangye Yeshe and Tsultrim Tenzin, and also Khenzur Nyima Wangyal, who came from Paris together with his wife, the singer Gazom Lhamo. Geshe Sangye Yeshe and Tsultrim Tenzin came from Triten Norbutse two weeks in advance and did a lot of preparations. Geshe Sangye Yeshe acted as the Umdze (master of ceremonies who leads the recitations). Ani Tsultrim Sangmo assisted too. Of course, Lama Sangye himself also participated in all the rituals. The Lamas performed rituals in a tent in the garden for three days from morning to night, almost non-stop, culminating in the Namdak initiation on the last day. We had good luck with the weather. Gazom Lhamo gave a recital the day before the consecration.




ZOOM
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Consecration and the Namdak initiation of the Stupa.

And how many lay practitioners came?

SF: Around twenty-five, maybe thirty people, the maximum number on the spot at any one moment was twenty, some came only for a part of the ceremony. People came from France, Poland, Hungary, Germany and from Austria. They are not visible in the pictures because it would have been complicated to ask everyone for permission to publish. Fortunately, nobody contracted Covid. We were very careful and tested people on their arrival.

Lama la, you have been living "full time" in Yeshe Sal Ling since 2017. What do you appreciate most about the place?

Yeshe Sal Ling is a very good place for meditation. There is pure air, it is located in higher altitude and there is a mountain just behind the center. All these are favorable conditions for practice. It is, however, a small center with rooms for only about 12-14 practitioners at the same time, and not comparable to Shenten, where sometimes hundreds of Bonpos congregate.

Photos: Maciej Czuchra

Yungdrung Tenzin: When I translate, it is a kind of shock

written by Jitka Polanská



Yungdrung Tenzin – Dominique Troulay by his civic name – was translating into French the teaching of Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche in this year's summer retreat. What does the process of translation look like from his perspective? "It is a kind of shock," he says. "The teacher starts talking and you have no choice but to listen very carefully, with absolute focus. It is a big responsibility to translate teachings, but I am happy to take this responsibility. "

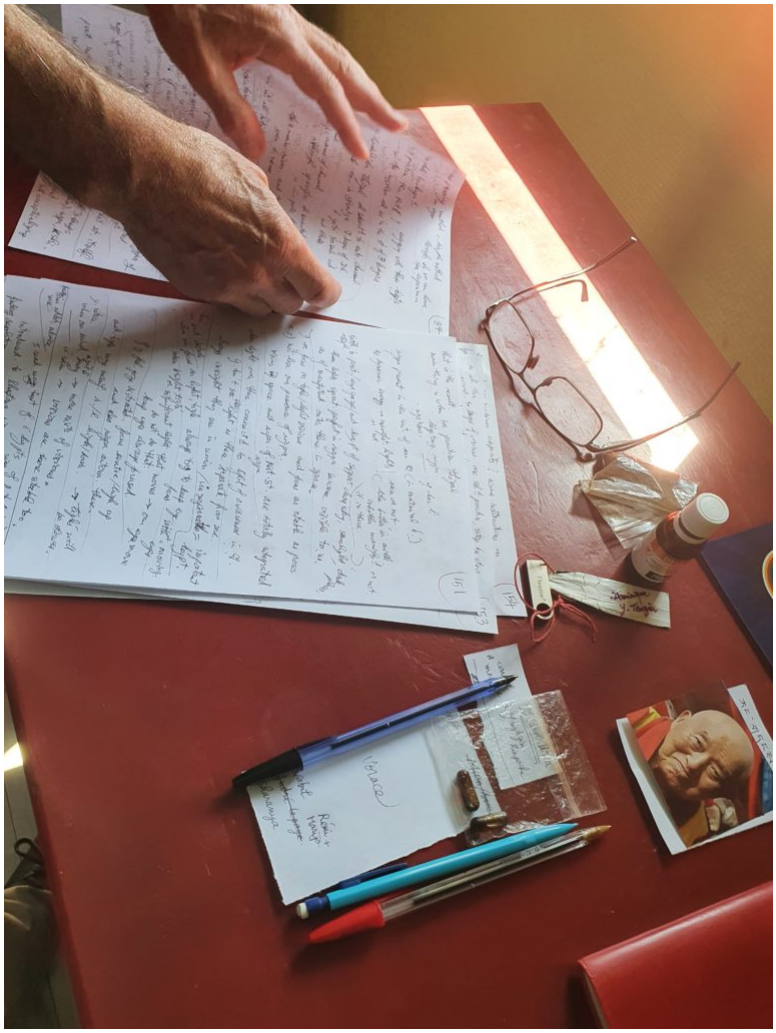
When you translate a teaching, do you know the text that the teacher is explaining?

Usually, I don´t. I am completely open to what I will hear, and I reproduce it in French. Sometimes the teacher may digress and talk about something that is not in the text, maybe comparing it with some other text – I need to be ready for anything. I just focus on what the teacher says and convey it in French accurately.

I see you writing a lot...

The notes are extremely important for me, I write down the maximum that I can of what the teacher says, almost every word. I want to be as faithful as I can. I feel this is a big responsibility, because

what is explained is of great importance. Actually, I do not like having to write so fast, but this is the only way I can do it. My memory is weak, and I cannot keep in my mind a speech lasting sometimes several minutes. So I need to write these notes. I have written more than two hundred pages during the three weeks of the summer retreat. In the evening I go through my notes again. It is an inspiring activity for me. But if it was possible not to take them, I would be happier. For example, if some technology could transcribe what the teacher says directly onto a screen and I could only listen – that would be much more comfortable for me.



“In the evening, I go through my notes again.”

How do you feel when you translate? Does that kind of concentration have any benefit for you?

It is a kind of shock. The teacher starts talking and you have no choice but to listen very carefully, with absolute focus. Sometimes I have one or two seconds to listen to a bird outside, but in general I have to be a hundred percent focused on what was said and what I have to say in translation. Even a small distraction is risky. I think it is a good practice, for sure.

It is a delight to listen to your translation, I mean it. Do other people come to you saying that they appreciate your translation?

Some people do. They tell me it helps them, even if they understand English. When they listen to my translation it helps them understand something that they did not understand or to be sure they understood well. And if some people have some doubts about what I said, I have my notes and we can check.

Does Khenpo Rinpoche understand your translation? His passive knowledge of French seems good.

I do not know exactly but I noticed sometimes, when somebody was translating and I was just listening, that he corrected the translation at a point, which means he understood the French words that were chosen.



“I am completely open to what I will hear.”

Khenpo Rinpoche usually waits until you finish translating, but in some cases it happens that he starts talking before you completed your translation. Is it stressful when you have

to stop him?

Yes, a little bit, but I have to do it. Sometimes I also have to ask him to repeat a word about which I am not sure or I forgot it. I would rather not but it is necessary. I have to be sure that I translate accurately. It is a responsibility, but I am happy to take this responsibility. I have big respect for Khenchen Rinpoche and devotion to him and I am very happy that I can translate for him and for the sangha.

You translated Khenpo Rinpoche´s occasional public talks in the past, but not regular retreats. You started to be more involved as a translator when Shenten began with online teachings, is that right?

Yes, I was not very confident about being able to do it, before and I am really surprised that I can. The online teachings during all those lockdowns were good practice for me. I did many, many hours of translations for Khenpo Gelek and his daily sessions, and then also for other teachers. Gradually, I gained more confidence. Online translation is simultaneous, and I like it, especially because I do not have to take any notes (he laughs).

The second part of the interview will bring a personal story of Yungdrung Tenzin, a Yungdrung Bon monk from a Western background.

Photos: Jitka Polanská