Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung: We should value our wonderful life

written by Jitka Polanská



The monastery of Triten Norbutse is above all an educational institution. This is what H.E. Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche has wanted for his monastic community: to be learned. How is the monastery´ s Yungdrung Bön Academy of Higher Studies organized? The abbot of Triten Norbutse and the beloved teacher of many western students Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche kindly answered this and other our questions.

The 25th anniversary of the Academy, celebrated in January of 2020, was attended by two thousand people, including representatives of the Nepali government. Around five hundred visitors came from the West. It looks like quite an accomplishment. But the beginning was, I guess, slow and hard.

It took five years of preparations to start the Academy. You have to meet all the necessary conditions. You need an infrastructure for basic necessities, enough qualified students and teachers and enough texts which students can use. First, we introduced a nine-year program but as soon as it was possible it was extended to become the current full-size curriculum of thirteen years. Yongdzin Rinpoche wanted to make it even more complete than it was traditionally in our principal monasteries. Rinpoche has always emphasized the importance of studies and learning, in his life and in the monasteries which he built.

The core of the Academy is the *Shedra*, translated as the Dialectic School. How many monks enrolled in the first class of the Dialectic School?

Twenty-one. And up to now, in total around 80 obtained the Geshe degree. The studies are quite difficult and not everybody finishes them. The monastery has grown a lot, since then. Currently, we have 120 monks studying at the *Shedra*. Beside the Dialectic School, our Academy has two more branches. *Drubdra*, which is a practice-based four-year program for those who want to focus on meditation, and a school of traditional Tibetan medicine. The latter takes nine year and is open to lay people, both men and women.

At what age do the monks usually start their studies?

They can be of different ages, depending on when they came to the monastery, but not younger than 15. Traditionally, it could have been earlier, nowadays the custom is to wait until the person is grown up enough to decide for themselves if they want to become monks. Only the fully ordained monks can become students of the *Shedra*.

Can you describe the teaching subjects of the Dialectic school?

We classify them into the so called five sciences: external and internal science, science of medicine, language studies and epistemology. Internal sciences are the main doctrinal teachings, all the philosophy and spiritual practices, methods of meditation. These, together with epistemology and logic are at the core of the Dialectic school. Doctrinal texts are discussed by monks in debates, to train them to expose the teaching well. There is lots of emphasis on debating. Students start with them since the very beginning of the curriculum, and they debate two three hours every day. In the tenth year monks study *vinaya*, the complex of monastic vows. The last three years are dedicated to the teachings that are considered as highest, which are tantra and dzogchen, the Great Perfection.

What about external sciences?

They are taught mainly in the afternoon and include astrology and other, we say general, sciences, for example poetry. Monks also study the language in which the teachings are written, classical Tibetan. Music, dance and craftwork are not part of the regular schedule, monks are trained in them during some periods of the year, especially before important rituals. Everyone needs to know how to make ritual objects of offering, paintings, sand mandalas, and how to play all the ritual instruments, and the different melodies used in chanting.

Do you plan any changes or innovations in the curriculum, for the future?

We hope there could be different programs for studying some of those arts and sciences in our monastery, for example more extensive studies of languages or visual arts. In the medical science it is already like this. Medical studies are partly included in the program of the Dialectic School, but it is also possible to become a specialist, a doctor of Tibetan medicine, *amchi* in Tibetan, in a separated nine-year program.

Can you describe the daily schedule of the students? Do you consider it demanding?

Well, yes, it does leave little free time indeed. The program starts at seven o´ clock in the morning and ends at seven in the evening, in the winter it starts one hour later in the morning and ends a half an hour earlier in the evening. But many monks wake up much earlier, I think generally around 5 am, and use the morning time according to their individual needs, often for memorizing texts. Students of the meditation school have to wake up at 4:30 and perform morning prayers followed by

meditation. The monastery´has a kind of alarm clock – a gong that calls those students to gather, at 4:30, and their loud prayers and chants wake up the others. In the evening, the monks go to bed around 11 o´ clock.

What is the program of the day?

There is one-hour teaching in the morning and one hour in the afternoon, from three to five there are debates and the rest is time for self-study and training. Beside this, the monks have to perform prayers and rituals requested by the public and benefactors of the monastery. This is traditionally the second function of the monastic community and also the main source of income: in exchange for this service people offer a donation. Monks do it in the breaks for breakfast and lunch and there are also four days in a month fully dedicated to the prayers, no classes are held in those days. Monks are divided in different groups and each of them performs different requested rituals. In this was they also learn, by the way.

Is there anything that you think would need an improvement, in the curriculum?

Well, sure, for example comparing it to Western higher education we do not train much our writing skills. A thesis is not a part of the curriculum. We have introduced written exams and encourage people to write, but more could be done.

As an abbot, you have a responsibility to feed and dress the monks of your monastery; how do you manage to provide for the basic needs of 300 people?

Thank to our benefactors we manage. One source of income is the offerings made for requested rituals mentioned before. Beside this, we also receive donations from individuals. Some people decide to sponsor a monk. The money goes to the general budget though.

The monastery looks very nice, colorful and cheerful, but at a closer look one discovers that conditions are quite basic, if not poor…

That is true. I think that we have built quite a good infrastructure over the years and our monastery is a good place to live. But still, living conditions are modest, we, as monks, can adapt and in many ways we compromise, so to say. There is only very simple food in most days, chapati and our Tibetan tea in the morning, lentils and rice and some vegetables for lunch and Tibetan noodle soup for dinner. Only during festivities and ceremonies food is richer. Two, three, even four monks usually share one very small room. Of course, there is no heating, as in most households here, in Kathmandu, and in the winter, nights are cold, the temperature can drop to 1 degree Celsius. Due to the lack of indoor space, the debates and some other activities, as well as examinations, have to be done outside in any weather. Monks also eat outside. With strong summer rains or when it is too cold, we have to interrupt activities. Our teachers teach monks in smaller groups in their bedrooms which is a traditional custom, but with the number of monks that we have now it has become difficult.

> **The monastery of Triten Norbutse in Nepal was built 30 years ago as the second big monastery of Yungdrung Bon´s tradition outside Tibet. The other one, Menri Monastery, is situated in Dolanji, in Himachal Pradesh, India. Nowadays, Triten Norbutse hosts around 300 monks.**

That´ s why you undertook a construction of a new building?

Yes, we plan to provide more spacious classrooms there, a dining hall and a new temple which can contain all of us and will function as our assembly hall. I have found courage to start the construction only after one of our benefactors promised to cover half of the costs of the project. For the second half we fundraise. It is not easy, but I have trust we will succeed.

The monastic education is evidently something that you see as meaningful even in the modern times. Can you share your view with someone who is not so sure about it?

When we call it monastic education maybe we make it narrower, smaller than it is. Traditionally, monasteries were cultural centers which trained people in all kinds of disciplines and arts, and not only monks. They were and still are a very important community centers, places of gathering. And they have served also as centers for medical advice and treatments. The religious aspect was not the only one. I believe that the monasteries can keep developing all those functions in today´ s world too.

You, following the wish of your root master Yongdzin Rinpoche, founded a boarding school for children from remote areas of the Himalayas, with the aim of giving them an opportunity for education in their own culture. It is located in Siliguri in India and it opened the first 4 grades in 2018. Is the Himalayan traditional culture in danger of extinction and if so, what are the reasons, in your opinion?

There may be many reasons: political, economical, geographical conditions, educational system**.** Also globalization has an impact. The more you are connected with the rest of the world – which is good, on one side – the more you are influenced by others and it is easy to lose your own language and culture, especially if it is a language not useful for practical purposes such as obtaining a good job. Tibetan language is very ancient and complex and it is a vehicle beneficial for all humanity, not just for Tibetans. We do our best to keep it alive. The aim of the school is to offer people from Himalayas an education in their own language, Tibetan, with a cultural aspect embedded in it.

Do you expect that after finishing their studies the children will go back to their villages?

We do not put such expectations on them. Of course, if they go back it is good, they help their communities to have better life, but to expect that all of them will do would not be realistic. If young people desire to broaden their horizon and go elsewhere, we should not force them to stay. It would not work anyway. And actually, maybe it is even good that they will mix with other people, carrying with them values that the school passed on them. They can share them with others, in this way, and influence the world positively.

Nowadays, in Western countries religion is left out of education and people are quite sensitive about what they see as indoctrination. Even the word religion is not very popular…

It depends on the background from which we look at the word “religion”, what kinds of associations it has. Maybe some people associate it with dogmas that have to be taken as they are or with there being no freedom of thought or something like this. But in our tradition, we do not perceive it this way. I have never felt restricted from thinking freely by my religion.

What does “religion” mean for you?

A quest for the absolute truth about reality. It can be named differently too. All are just names. In the past, the word religion was well-received, then it was replaced with the word spirituality which was regarded as more acceptable. Maybe, nowadays, people prefer to call anything trustable

“science”… why not, after all (smiling).

What is the essence of the Yungdrung Bön religion, then? Why it is worth studying it?

Traditionally, our spiritual or religious practices are designed to help people find balance and unity in their body and mind. Make them freer from any kind of negative thoughts, emotions, actions. They teach us what are causes of suffering and pains in the life and how to be free from them. Also, what is the basic goodness residing in every human, every sentient being. Taking care of our mind, keeping it in a good condition, peaceful and not controlled by unhealthy patterns – this is the dimension of life which is addressed by our teaching. The ultimate goal, according to these teachings, is to free ourselves from all the conditioning of our minds. This is called real happiness.

Western people see the idea of life intimately connected to suffering as somehow gloomy…

In reality, recognizing that suffering is an inevitable part of life´s experiences helps us live better, more happily. It is a kind of assessment of life as it is. Bön does not disdain life. On the contrary, it encourages people to appreciate life. We should appreciate favorable conditions that we have, our endowment as human beings. Do we really and deeply appreciate, for example, that we have senses through which we can perceive, we can see, we can hear, we can touch? That we have a mind that can study and learn? We should refresh our appreciation for these things all the time, not take them for granted. Just this alone can be a source of happiness. When we get sick or meet some other problems, knowing that they are embedded in life by default and that they are impermanent, as is everything else, can also help us to bear them with more patience.

> **Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche was born in Dhorpatan, a very remote area of western Nepal. At the age of 11, he entered the local monastery, Tashi Gegye Thaten Ling. After completing an initial course of study in Bön ritual texts and Tibetan calligraphy, he moved to Dolanji, India for further studies at the Dialectics School of Menri Monastery. In 1994, after successfully passing his exams and being awarded the Geshe degree, Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche went to Kathmandu, Nepal to continue his studies of Tantra and Dzogchen under the guidance of Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche at Triten Norbutse Monastery. In 1996, he was appointed as Ponlop (Head Teacher) at Triten Norbutse Monastery, at the Yungdrung Bön Academy of Higher Studies, and in 2001 he became abbot.**



Photo Christophe Moulin, April 2022

Gomdra helps me to keep my practice alive the whole year long

written by Jitka Polanská



Esther Pérez de Eulate from Madrid is one of the thirty participants in Shenten´s in-depth meditation program – the Gomdra. She knows what it's like to stay for seventy days in a closed retreat and then go back to a life in a big city. "Yongdzin Rinpoche has been emphasizing the importance of integration and it is definitely a great topic for me. The Gomdra has helped me greatly to keep the Dharma alive, in my heart, even in the midst of my samsaric life," she says.

Esther, you are one of the practitioners who attend the current Gomdra. What did you do when the 70 days of this year´s retreat ended, last November?

I left Shenten with by brother Melchi, who is also in the Gomdra, and we went to our native town where he lives. I spent some time with my family there and then I went home to Madrid. Many things, many duties, were waiting there for me. Logically, I was more or less three months out of home.

How does it feel to go back to the usual life, after such a long period of retreat?

I attended the previous Gomdra too, so I spent six seventy-day periods at Shenten before – so I have some experience of how it feels (laughs). My mood depends on whether I have a task, a project, work, waiting for me, or whether I have to invent my life on my return.

There was a year in which I was in the middle of working on a documentary and I dived back into it, with great focus. A training of the mind such as the one in the Gomdra increases the ability to focus, among other things. That transition was surprisingly easy. In other times, it is more like: "what shall I do now?"

The Gomdra and the practice in general have changed my perception of life. Sometimes I feel in conflict with my ordinary life. There is a wish to go deeper in the practice, but it is not easy to cut the bond to the samsaric world. I do not dislike the cultural life, going out with friends etc.

Anyway, I found practicing seriously and producing and directing documentaries at the same time impossible, so I decided to stop creating documentaries on my own. I have done two and I know how much work it is.

What will you do, instead?

I can participate in a project of someone else, I can do short videos, I can help my friends when they need some audio-video material. But I do not want to do things that would be overwhelming because they would weaken my practice too much.

Why did you decide to take part in the Gomdra?

I went to Shenten for the first time in 2007, it was a five-day teaching with Yongdzin Rinpoche and Khenpo Rinpoche and I remember telling myself "this is my practice". The experience of the natural state was clear, I felt good. But when I got back home, my discipline and practice was much weaker. I know that it takes time to develop stability, I had been practicing before that with Namkhai Norbu and his community in Madrid, but still, with time, I felt that I would need to do something different to enhance my progress. I thought the Gomdra would be the opportunity for that.

You entered the second cycle of the Gomdra, starting in 2014, right?

Yes. The Gomdra was introduced at Shenten in 2009 and the second four- year cycle started in 2014. Besides me, my brother Melchiades and my sister Raquel took part. Actually, Melki made it possible for Raquel and me to be there, he was our sponsor.

Do you remember your impressions from the very beginning of the first retreat?

The beginning was hard for me. Waking up early with a cloudy mind and having to recite the morning prayers, sangcho, for half an hour of in Tibetan, day after day, was challenging. There is a lot of recitations in the Gomdra. Every day, the group performs the so called Four Generosities: sangcho, chutor, surcho, chod. It is around two hours of recitations. Besides that, at for o´clock, we accumulate mantras or recite the entreaty prayer to the lineage holders, for another hour. So, if you are not used to it (and I was not) it might be a heavy load. But I understood, from the very beginning, that it was beneficial for me, it was purifying me with strong energy and empowering me. Especially when it is integrated with the Dzogchen view.

> **The Gomdra was established in 2009. Each Gomdra consists of four annual 70-day long periods. Starting in September and finishing in November, around thirty participants stay in closed retreat. Currently the third cycle of Gomdra is taking place. The current cycle started in 2019 but was interrupted in 2020 due to the pandemic for one year. Between the cycles there is always a year-long break.**

There is also a teaching, every day?

Yes, one hour of teaching by Khenpo Gelek. In this way we were able to integrate the teaching with the practice of Dzogchen. For each Gomdra a different Dzogchen cycle is chosen. It was Zhang-

Zhung Nyen Gyud in 2014 and this time it is Yangtse Longchen, belonging to the Dzogchen cycle of Dragpa Korsum.

How did you cope with the tight schedule of the retreat?

The schedule is very tight indeed, we are busy from 6.30 to 21.30. This last time I did not miss even one session of practice, but in the past, there were days when I felt exhausted, and I skipped some. But that was exceptional. Usually I try to do them all as much as I can.

For the whole period of seventy days, nobody of the retreatants can leave Shenten. Did it sometimes feel a bit claustrophobic?

When I heard about the Gomdra for the first time, I thought that staying in a closed group for seventy days would not be possible for me. But then, I wanted so much to take this opportunity to deepen my practice that I decided that I will not think about this, I will just try.

Yes, sometimes you feel like you cannot take more. You get tense, exhausted, sad sometimes. But you just go on and on, you do your practice, and you see that your mood changes. You have time to observe your mind and you see it is changing all the time. You really experience impermanence.

There are people from different cultures in the group, with different habits and behavior, which can sometimes cause irritations. Being together can help a lot, although it also brings with it some distraction and disturbances. But Khenpo Gelek has the quality of bringing joy into the group. He is a leader who shows the way and encourages us: “go, go, go!”. And the power of the group is in the design of the Gomdra. These group retreats are organized by the monasteries for their monks too, because it helps the practice to do it together.

What about food? This must be also a sensitive topic, people from different countries have different tastes and needs…

Yes, food was a hot topic at the beginning, in the first Gomdra. Food is very important in the retreat. It is not just a matter of “I like, I do not like”. If food is not good, you do not feel good. Also, a good food makes your day much nicer. You work hard all day long and then you want to eat some tasty food. But the first year of my first Gomdra the cook used lots of canned food and additives and many people complained and asked for cleaner and fresher food. Since then, cooking has improved a lot. I would say that food is good now and people are more or less happy.

After completing the program, the participant is supposed to be ready for the 49-day long retreat in the dark. Some do, some don´t. Did you go to the dark retreat?

Yes, I went and did the whole period, which I didn’t imagine I was able to do, but you really grow and develop your practice, in the four years. You really improve a lot, and you are better equipped to maintain your practice when you are at home. I do not have many Dharma connections in Madrid and sometimes I feel like I’m living on an island. The online teaching during the whole pandemic has been really useful. After I came back from the Gomdra, there was DailyShenten and other teachings and we practiced together with the teachers and the sangha. It has been very helpful for finding some good balance between my spiritual and samsaric existence. This is the main point, the importance of integration. Yongdzin Rinpoche has been emphasizing it. I can do it better and better, keeping the Dharma alive, in the heart, even in the midst of the samsaric life.

Esther Pérez de Eulate created “A day in the Gomdra”.

You can watch it HERE.

A Day in the Gomdra at Shenten Dargye Ling – a video by a participant

written by Jitka Polanská



This short video, directed by Esther Pérez de Eulate in the autumn of 2021, brings you in Shenten Dargye Ling when it is closed to public. It gives a glimpse of the everyday life of the participants of Shenten Dargye Ling's in – depth meditation program – the Gomdra. The program was established in 2009. Each Gomdra consists of four annual 70 day long periods. Starting in September and finishing in November, around thirty participants stay in closed retreat. Currently the third cycle of Gomdra is taking place. Esther was shooting her video during the second year of the current cycle which started in 2019 but was interrupted in 2020 due to the pandemic. Between the cycles there is always a year long break.

A Day in the Gomdra: a video by Esther Pérez de Eulate, October-November 2021

Anne and Amrei: how our lives got interwoven with Bön

written by Jitka Polanská



Anne Brunila from Finland and Amrei Vogel from Germany joined the Council of Association Shenten Dargye in 2021. This is their story with Bön.

Anne: With Bön, my practice and meditation has developed

My spiritual journey began when I was 16 and learned about Buddhism at school. At that moment, I had a strong feeling that I found something very precious for my life, and a place where I belonged. Everything I read resonated strongly with me. Since I wanted to understand emotions and thinking; how the mind works; what is the reality; what is the meaning of life and how to find true peace and happiness in one's mind, it is no wonder that I became deeply motivated to learn more about Buddhism.

I spent much time reading all the Buddhist texts and books which I could find in libraries and bookshops. Very soon I realized that I felt most connected to Tibetan Buddhism and the teachings of great Tibetan masters like Longchenpa, Gampopa, Patrul Rinpoche, Kalu Rinpoche, Dilgo Khyentse, Namkhai Norbu, and of course, His Holiness the 14th. Dalai Lama. This reading gave me some basic understanding of Buddhist philosophy and the science of the mind. The more I read the more I wanted to learn and hoped that some day I would find a teacher and begin practicing.

I met my first teacher, Tarab Tulku Rinpoche, in the late 1980's, and it was then that I began practicing daily. During the retreats Rinpoche explained the foundations of Buddhist philosophy, practice and meditation. I was his student for some years but left when he established a four-year training program on Buddhist psychology in Sweden. At that point we were a small group of practitioners pondering how to find a new teacher. We were taught that the most important thing is to make sure that the teacher is qualified. With this in mind, we decided to follow the teachings and initiations given by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in various European countries and the US. I received my first Dzogchen teaching and initiation from His Holiness in 2000, in Montpellier, France.

In 2000 I moved to Brussels and found my way to Rigpa, and began going to Sogyal Rinpoche's teachings and doing the Ngöndro according to the Nyingma tradition. I also became interested in Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's teachings and took part in his summer retreats in Merigar, Italy. Because

I had a strong belief that my disabled son, too, had a connection to Tibetan Buddhism, I took him with me. He first met some Tibetan monks and doctors a few years earlier, in a big exhibition of Tibetan culture in Helsinki. On that occasion four monks from Namgyal monastery were making the Kalachakra sand mandala, and after they had finished, four other monks made another big sand mandala. My son was so enthusiastic about the monks' work that I had to bring him frequently back to the museum where the monks were happy to see him. Since then he has felt very easy and close to all the Tibetan monks and lamas he has met.

I think it was 2009 when I first heard about Bön from friends who had been to Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche's teachings. As soon as I heard the words "Bön" and "Tenzin Wangyal", it gave me a real thrill and I instantly realized that Bön is my tradition. Later, I found out that "Tenzin Wangyal" was also the name of Shardza Tashi Gyaltsen's master, and maybe it was because of this that I got some kind of inexplicable déjà-vu experience when hearing the name.

I wanted to attend Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche's teachings as soon as I could to learn about Bön. I listened to his online teachings and when he came to Europe, I flew to Berlin to his Bardo teachings. The timing turned out to be especially indispensable: my father passed away only two months after the teachings and I still had them fresh in memory and could do the prayers and practices for him. I had already received Bardo teachings from Sogyal Rinpoche ten years earlier, shortly before my mother passed away. Thanks to the teachings I was able to assist her during the death process and do Bardo prayers for her.

In 2014 I got to know about Yongdzin Rinpoche and Shenten Dargye Ling. This was very fortunate because in the summer retreat Rinpoche started to teach the Twenty-One Nails (Zerbu) with Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche. Meeting Yongdzin Rinpoche and Khen Rinpoche was a life-changing experience for me. My practice and meditation developed more after that retreat than during all the previous years. I was so happy that I had finally found my heart teachers and the lineage. In the same year I also met my third heart teacher Khenpo Gelek Jinpa. I sometimes felt sorry that I had not found Bön and my precious teachers earlier, but this was my Karma. Yet I understand how fortunate I had been!

Encouraged by Khenchen Rinpoche we founded a Bön association and Sangha called Dechen Ritrö in 2016. This very auspicious name was given by Yongdzin Rinpoche, the same name as Sharda Rinpoche's famous retreat place in Tibet. We organized Khenpo Gelek's teachings since 2014 on Gyalwa Chagtri, and Khencen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche's teachings on Shardza Rinpoche's Heart Drops of Dharmakaya (Künzang Nyingtik) since 2018 in Helsinki, and recently on zoom too. Geshe Lungrik gave us teachings on the Medicine Buddha practice. Via zoom we have been able to open these wonderful teachings to Sanghas across the world.

During the past year I, together with a friend, translated Shardza Rinpoche's text into Finnish. Upon Khenpo Tenpa Rinpoche's suggestion, and with Philippe Cornu's kind permission, we used his French translation for this purpose. The book has just been published and my wish is that it will be of benefit to the Finnish practitioners and to everybody interested in Dzogchen.

Amrei: I wanted to understand what I practice

I just finished my studies of Central Asian Studies at Humboldt-Universität in Berlin, with a focus on Tibetan culture and anthropological methods. My final thesis was about death rituals in a Bön community in Dolpo, Nepal. How did it come about that my university studies and my path as a practitioner converged? I think that my parents played a role in it. My mother has a very critical mind, in a healthy, positive way, and she always encouraged me to understand deeply what I do; what I pursue; what I commit myself to; to explore systematically what I feel as a choice of my heart.

Practically speaking, I wanted to understand words in prayers that I recite and so I started learning Tibetan. I also wanted to know the historical and cultural background of the spiritual school that has become so important for my personal growth. I wished to see places connected historically and culturally with Bön, so I went to Nepal. My life has gradually been permeated with curiosity and interests related to Yungdrung Bön.

Then I found a scholar here at the university in Berlin, Prof. Dr. Huber, who also did research on Bön, mainly as the pre-Buddhist culture in Tibet,. Also, Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung´s suggestions were very important to me, and he supported my plans. I shared with him that I was not sure about what I should focus my master's thesis on, and he said: you could go to Dolpo in Nepal.It is an area where people are still practicing very ancient rituals connected to death and dying. I went there, in 2016 for the first time, and I started exploring the death rituals in one village. I returned several times and based my thesis on what I found and experienced there.

I have been connected with Bön my whole life, because it has been rooted in my family. My father was a practitioner for decades. Originally, he was a student of Chogyal Namkhai Norbu.Then, in the early nineties, maybe in the 1991 when I was born, he met Yongdzin Rinpoche for the first time and became his student. As a child I went with my father to teachings of both masters and he told me that I was very curious and paid attention to the teachings. Our house itself is a meditation center for the Dzogchen community of Namkhai Norbu´s students, the Yungdrung Bön Sangha, as well as various other Zen and yoga groups.

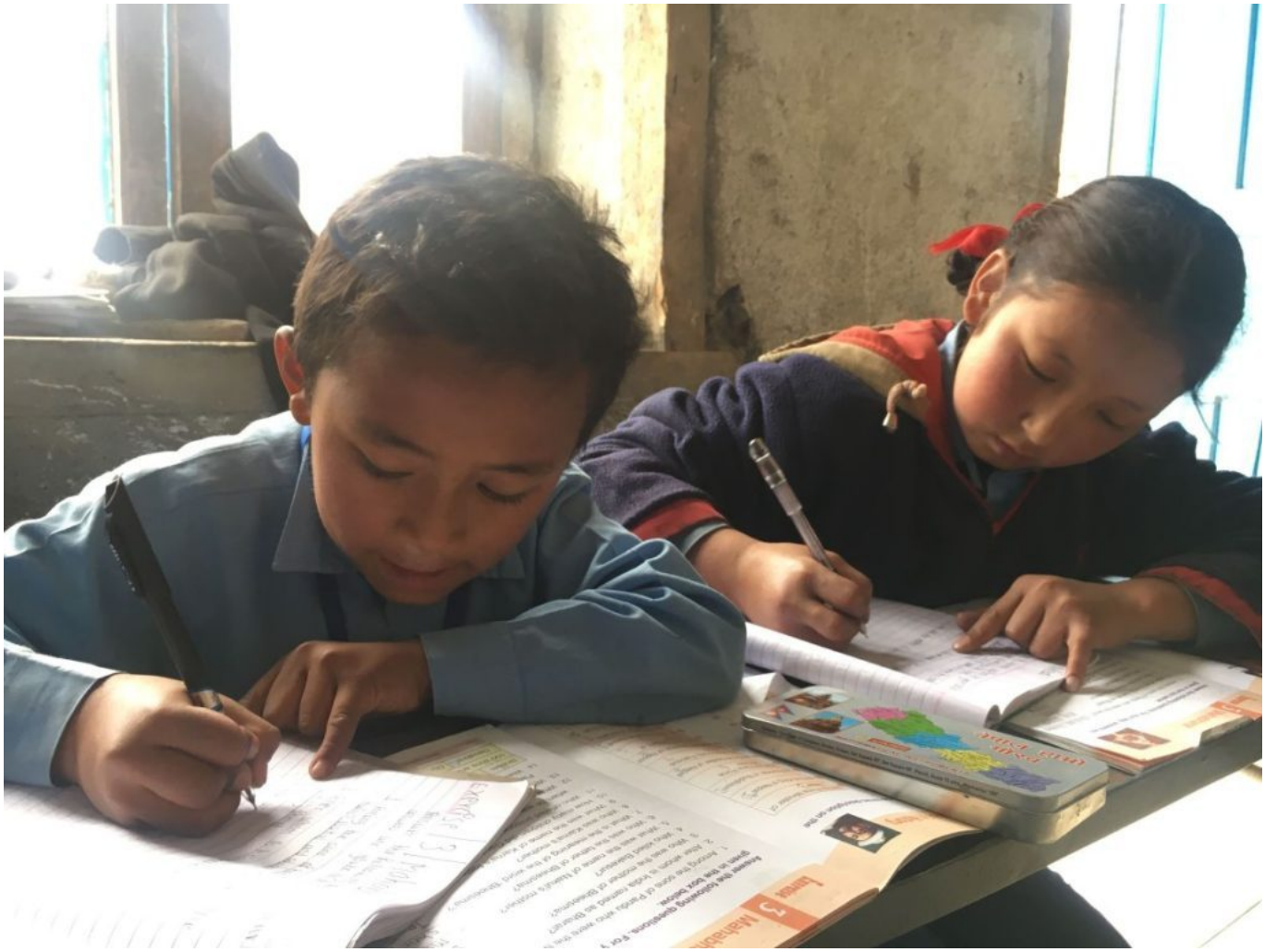
From about 2001, Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung and Khenpo Gelek started to come to our home annually, and the fact that they were, in a way, part of my home created a close connection with the teaching, which grew slowly. When I was twenty three, I started practicing. I had just finished my bachelor degree and I did not want to continue to master studies right away. Instead, I wanted to go abroad, but not just to travel, I wished to work, to be useful somehow, and I asked my parents what I could do. My father said: you could go to Nepal, we know people there. I also asked Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung, when he came to teach at our place, if he had some work for me in Nepal, and he said, yes, just come, we will find something.

In November 2014 I went to Kathmandu for the first time. I stayed in the guesthouse of Triten Norbutse for a period. It was the first timestudents of the boarding school in Lubrak, a village in Mustang, had enough money, given by a sponsor, to spend their winter holiday in Kathmandu. Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung introduced me to them and to Norbu, the monk who was taking care of them. I then began teaching them English and some social studies. This is how I spent that winter. When they went back to their village, I joined them. It was my first time in a Bönpo village in the Himalayas. I established a close connection with the students and this made me come back again and again.

Afterwards, Amrei helped the boarding school of Lubra. Read the story here.

When you are there and observe, you can see what is really needed

written by Jitka Polanská



Amrei Vogel from Germany was the force behind a project that improved the life of the children and teachers of the Chasey Kengtse Hostel. It is a part of the boarding school in Lubra, a village in Mustang where Bönpo communities had settled. Thanks to considerable funding from the German government that she administrated, the boarding school got a new kitchen, dormitories, a reading room, and a green house. The teachers were provided with training in modern pedagogical methods. This is Amrei´s account with more details.

Nepal is a very special for me, I feel a close connection with many places and people there. The school in Lubra which is a small village in Mustang, has existed for a long time. In the past, villages in Mustang probably all had their own tiny schools, but for practical reasons, later some schools started serving more villages. Boarding schools are very common in the mountains of Nepal, because villages are very far from each other. To give an idea: the closest village from Lubra is a two hours walk.

In the 1970's or 1980's the tibetologist Charles Ramble visited Lubra for his research. By the way, all the research about Bön culture in this village refers somehow to him. Having become familiar with the local community he also looked for support in the West and, as a result one big sponsor has been helping the school financially since then. It is a steady rock the school can rely on. A French organization called Club Tibet also helped greatly. When I first got in contact with them, the school could count on them too but more was needed. In the earthquake of 2015 one of the buildings of the school collapsed. I was in Nepal at that time and after my return to Germany I looked for ways to get further help to them.

> *Beside the Panda Khola river, between Jomsom and Kagbeni at an altitude of about 3,000 metres, lies the little village of Lubra (also spelled Lubrak or Lupra). The name means "the cliff (brak) of the serpent-spirits (lu)". It is the earliest surviving community of the Bon religion in Nepal, and the only Bonpo in Mustang. This gives it special cultural importance. There are no monks in the community, but only married householder-lamas. The Bon religion is intricately interwoven with folk rituals and ceremonies. Since Lubra is a small village, most children come to the school from neighboring villages. Not only Bonpos, but also Sakya families and even some Hindu families send their children to the school.*

I found out that it was possible to get funding from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. In Germany, beside my studies, I work as a programme manager at the International Department of Humboldt-Universität. I have learned a lot about project management, organising, and such things. It feels natural to use those skills for the benefit of the Yungdrung Bön sangha and tradition.



Amrei Vogel: When you are there and observe, you see what is needed.

I attended seminars about how to apply for this funding, because it is quite complicated, but it eventually worked. We received a grant of 127,000 EUR for a three-year project which started in 2017 and was concluded in 2019. Of course, they do not give you the money just like that. It requires thorough planning and tangible results. The criteria were quite strict and the project had to be sustainable. We did not get money just for building a house.

The Nepalese NGO Mustang Bön Action was established as the official organization of the project, and Charles Ramble was involved through the Kalpa Group, an organization that he had founded to support of Bön worldwide. On the German side, I worked on behalf of the foundation Yungdrung Bön Stiftung (YBS), because I could not apply for grants as a private person. By the way, the YBS got the same governmental funding for the medical school at Triten Norbutse, many years ago. That means

that we were already in the files of the government and there was some evidence that we could carry out the project, that we are reliable. That's why we were also eligible to apply for a higher amount of funding. So, officially it was a collaboration of YBS and Mustang Bön Action. On the German part it was me and on the Nepalese part, it was mostly Kemi, a friend originally from Lubra who worked as the project onsite manager, and Namgyal, the headmaster of the school who is responsible for the accounting of the Chasey Kengtse Hostel – the boarding part of the school.

Courtesy of Amrei Vogel

> more videos here , in our Youtube channel

Chasey Kengtse Hostel is separate from the classroom buildings, they are actually on two different hills. While the boarding part of the school is run as a private hostel, the school itself is partly governmental. That is why there are teachers appointed by the Nepalese government and others which are employed privately. A monk from the Triten Norbutse is part of the teaching staff.

> *Chasey Kengtse Hostel was founded by Mustang Bon Action and is associated with the governmental school in Lubra. It's an important establishment of education and the preservation of culture in Mustang. Before it opened in 2002 there had been a growing demand of Bonpo families in Mustang for a school where children could receive a high standard education and learn about their own religious tradition and the native culture of Mustang. From nursery to class eight, the students are taught in all common subjects of the Nepalese school system, such as mathematics; Nepali language; science; social sciences and English. Tibetan language and cultural events in the village, such as dances and rites and festivals complete this education. Students have half an hour of prayer time in the morning and in the evening, and they usually read prayers of the Yungdrung Bon tradition..*

What did the project include? We rebuilt the damaged building of the hostel, adding some new parts, including bedrooms, bathrooms and a new kitchen. Before, the kitchen was just a hut with a fire. Now the school has a proper kitchen using either gas or a wood fire. We also built a greenhouse, a building with stone walls and a transparent roof. The sun is strong there, as is the wind, so when plants are protected from the wind they grow well. With the green house, the school is able to grow vegetables. Families in the village have their own tiny gardens, but they cannot provide food for 80 children and 20 teachers.

The third part of the project was the teacher training. For this, we worked with the Rato Bangala Foundation from Kathmandu. Their approaches and methods are advanced and useful for Lubra. The training provided the teachers with some notions of children-centered teaching and active learning, teamwork etc. For one part of the training, teachers went to Kathmandu, further parts took place in Lubra. Teachers were taught techniques for using the natural environment in teaching. I remember that children were learning about natural elements and teachers told them to go out for an hour and come back with something which would represent an element. Simple and effective. You can teach mathematics outdoors too, students were measuring the school building, for example, and it was a joy both for them and for teachers. They learned how to invent little games that make learning fun and in the end the teachers told me that they enjoy teaching more than before.

For five years, I spent several weeks each year at the school where I was in daily touch with the life of the children and adults. I learned a lot in all those years – about education, life in the mountains,

and humans. I mostly stayed with the children and simply spent time with them. I engaged with them, observed and listened. This is how I learned about their needs and wishes.These observations are powerful. A simple example: I noticed that the smaller kids were so tired in the evenings that theyrested their heads on their arms and slept instead of doing homework. Others were running around, disturbing older kids who were trying to focus on their studies. Reflecting on this issue with the teachers, we decided to change the daily schedule; we introduced more breaks during the day and different bedtimes according to the age groups. Smaller kids went to bed earlier so that the bigger kids would have the silence necessary for studying. It was an improvement for everyone. And it was so simple, it did not cost any money, what was needed was just being there and seeing what was happening. The whole project developed in similar ways – all started from observing, listening, discussing.

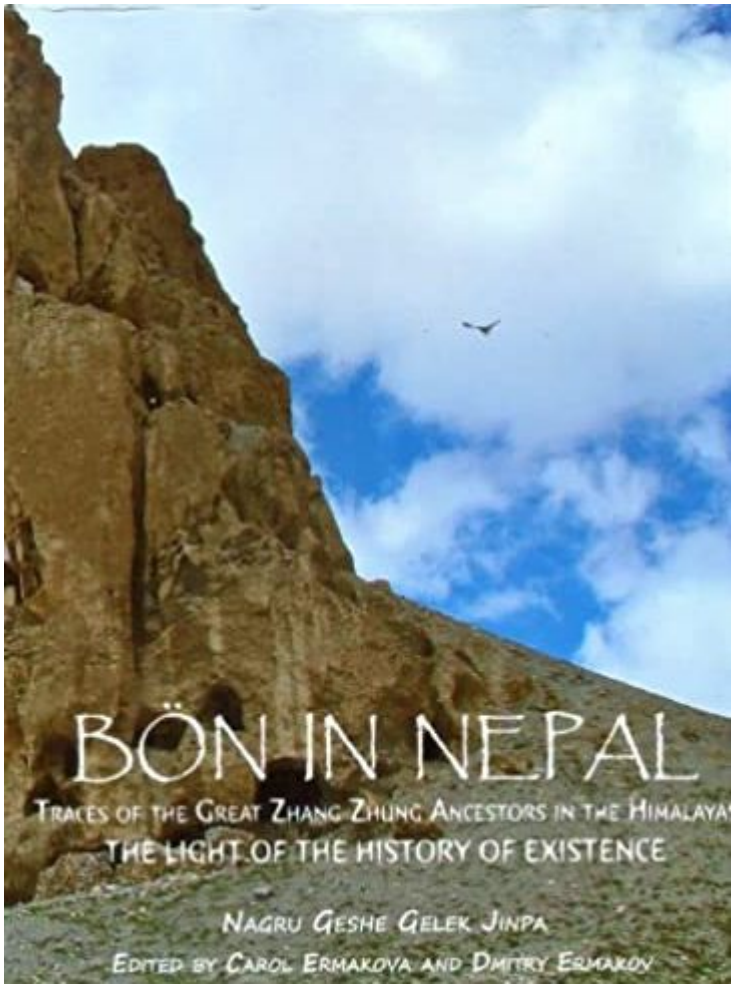
In 2019 I organized a Yungdrung Bön pilgrimage for sixteen practitioners from Germany, Austria, and The Netherlands. On that tour, we spent some days in Lubra. Just at that time, the village and school community organized a beautiful, memorable opening ceremony to conclude the project.

I'm very happy to see how the Chasey Kengtse Hostel is developing and the kids and teachers are living together in such a healthy natural and social environment.

(The pilgrimage that Amrei organized will be covered in another article. "Before the pandemic, my plan was even to offer pilgrimages every year – and I haven't given up on that dream yet," says Amrei.)

> *Travelling to Lubra*: t*here is a direct bus from Kathmandu to Jomson. If you start your journey in the afternoon, you will arrive in Jomson in the next morning. From Jomson, it is approximately two hours walk to the village. The road is not very comfortable, so it is preferable to take a bus halfway to a junction and then walk for another hour.*

Bön in Nepal by Khenpo Gelek Jinpa opens a window onto the lives of Bönpos in Nepal today, gracefully combining khenpo's personal diary with his meticulous research to provide the reader with a moving yet accurate account. By matching scriptural texts and historical documents with family histories and local folklore, Khenpo Gelek is able to pinpoint several important sacred sites previously lost to us. This book also contains a wealth of information on monasteries, ngagpa centres, family shrines, lineages and rituals regularly performed today in the Bönpo enclaves.


BÖN IN NEPAL
Traces of the Great Zhang Zhung Ancestors in the Himalaya
THE LIGHT OF THE HISTORY OF EXISTENCE
Nagru Geshe Gelek Jinpa
Edited by Carol Ermakova and Dmitry Ermakov









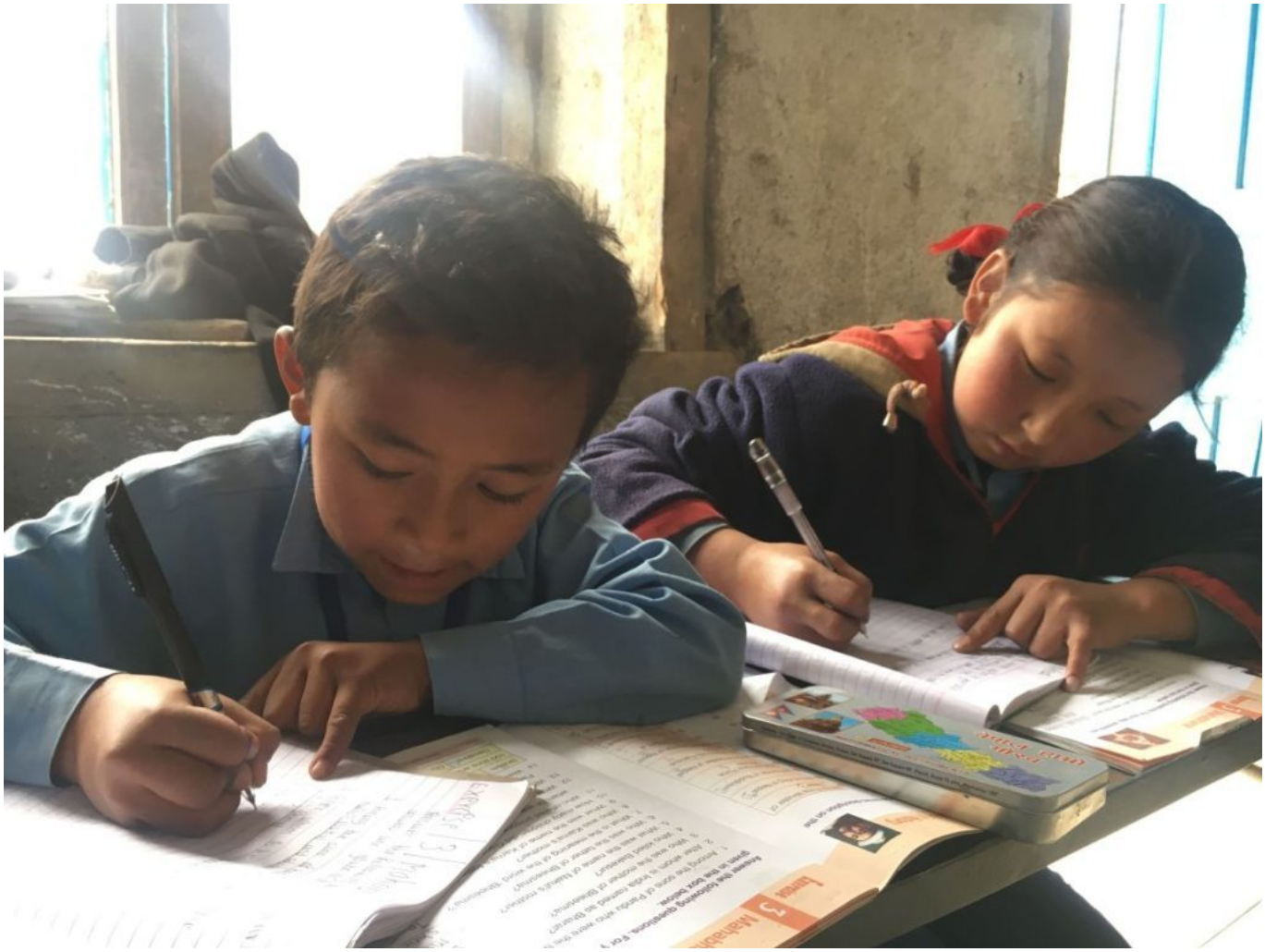









GAP
























OM MA TRI MU YE SA-LE-DU
LUBRA
NTHC/ACAP











Photos: courtesy of Amrei Vogel

Life at Triten Norbutse

written by Jitka Polanská




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A few pictures taken at Triten Norbutse monastery in Kathmandu, the home of His Excellence Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Ripoche, the founder of Shenten Dargye Ling. If you have nice pictures of the monastery that you want to share with others, send them to us and we will publish them here.

Individual retreats with skygazing? Will be possible

written by Jitka Polanská



If you have a wish to support Shenten Dargye Ling, a place which has been blessed by many years of Yongdzin Rinpoche' s presence, a central place of gathering and practice of our community, you can do it now. A necessary and costly renovation of the farm house, the Longère, has been taking place since the autumn 2021. Khenpo Gelek´s plan is to transform the building into a facility for personal retreats. "There is a marvellous view over the fields and it is just perfect for the skygazing," he says. In the following letter, which we are happy to publish here, the team of Cogreagation Shenten Dargye Ling explains what works need to be done. As a myriad of drops create an ocean, every, even small contribution counts…

Dear sangha sisters and brothers, dear friends of Shenten Dargye Ling,
We hope that you are all in good health and doing well despite this very difficult period we have been living through since March 2020. One good thing is that we have been able to get together and support each other via online teachings and practice. We hope and pray that the situation in the world will get better soon and that we can start the teachings and retreats again at Shenten Dargye Ling.

We are very lucky to have been able to enjoy, over many years, the possibility of receiving teachings and initiations from our precious master and living Buddha Yongdzin Rinpoche, as well as from Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche, here at Shenten. Thanks to our generous benefactor Loel Guinness they established this monastery and retreat center in 2005, and have been able to organize annual retreats with the help of many hard-working volunteers. Shenten Dargye Ling was recognized by the French Ministry of Interior as a Religious Congregation in 2006, confirming its status as a fully independent and authentic tradition.



The outside renovation was carried on by a team led by Monika Trojan. Monika, together with Pierre Averous and Alain Guéniot, is a member of the “building team” of Congregation Shenten Dargye Ling.

The buildings in Shenten are very old; the Château dates from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries and the Longère from the 17th century. This means that it is absolutely necessary to carry out renovations and repairs continuously. Over many years, and especially in the past two years, we have been undertaking major renovations in the Château. In 2020-2021 the old sewage systems, water pipes and hot water boiler were replaced, and the rooms were painted. We also painted the rooms and corridors in the Pavillion.

Until now we have managed to keep the renovation costs affordable by doing a significant part of the work ourselves with the help of many volunteers. However, in the next phase we need to hire professional people who have special the skills and experience required for repairing old buildings. In this situation, we turn to you once again and ask your help and support in this project.

There is an urgent and unavoidable need to repair the Longère, the long building adjacent to the Château. The walls of the building have severe cracks all around, and the stones are becoming displaced. It is absolutely necessary to repair and fortify the walls before they start crumbling and the building becoming unsafe to use. Old rain gutters, sewage systems and water pipes, as well as windows and doors have to be replaced. We began this project this autumn, but in order to be able to continue in the spring 2022, we must hire professional people with special skills to do the most demanding work.

In the second phase of this project, Khenpo Gelek has a dream and an earnest wish to turn one part

of the Longère building into a long-term personal retreat facility for practitioners, with two rooms and bathrooms and a small kitchen. This would provide a perfect place to practice sun-gazing with a beautiful open view on the lake side. Khen Rinpoche's former house could also be transformed into a long-term retreat house with two rooms. For that, we need to build a small kitchen and fireplace and to install a hot water boiler.

Lastly, it is necessary to order and install a gate to improve the safety in the area and to protect the property from thieves.

All this costs a lot of money, which we cannot afford without your generosity. Our very rough estimate of the costs at this stage is around 60 000 – 80 000 euros. All contributions, however small, would be greatly appreciated and welcome in helping us to complete this important project in 2022.

A quote from Zermig, the middle version of Buddha Tönpa Shenrab's biography:
"If motivated by the mind of pure devotion, even one palmful of soil elevates the building and one palmful of water settles the dust, and each drop of water held in the palm and countless numbers of dust particles held in the palm are causes of joy, happiness and merit."

May Shenten Dargye Ling, the most important seat of the original Tibetan culture and tradition in the West, develop and flourish for years to come!

Please send you donations to our bank account specially for this purpose:

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Another view of the Longére.

Editorial: Online magazine of Shenten Dargye Ling is born!

written by Jitka Polanská



Dear readers,

voilá the Speech of Delight, a new online magazine of Shenten Dargye Ling and its community which comes in replacement of the identically titled newsletter that our sangha used to have in the past. Welcome to its site! We opted for this format because we think it will allow us to deliver you interesting stories more fluently and also be more interactive.

Speech of Delight will focus on Shenten but we will also include stories of sangha members and their activities, as well as report about events and projects of Triten Norbutse Monastery, the home of the founder of Shenten Dargye Ling, our beloved teacher His Excellence Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche.

We would also like to disclose richness of bon and its different aspects to the public of both practitioners and readers who are just keen to know more about this spiritual tradition. We would like also to inform you about new publications and audiovideo material related to Yungdrung Bon.

Speech of Delight in its new coat has received blessings and encouragement from our precious teachers and leaders of our community Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche and Khenpo Gelek Jinpa. They also agreed, together with Wolfgang Reuter, who is a member of Shenten Dargye Ling Association, to sit on the Editorial board of the magazine.

We hope that you will enjoy reading it. We plan to add new content regularly and develop it gradually, with your help. Let us know your feedback and suggestions!

Jitka Polanská, editor-in-chief

Speech of Delight