

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

written by Jitka Polanská



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

**When and how did you meet for the first time?**

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

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

As you may know, there are many stairs leading to the monastery, and as I climbed them and reached the top, I looked up and there was a monk standing there and watching me. It was Lodoe.

He was very friendly. He took my hand and led me to the monastery. He showed me around, we went to the temple, to the library of the monastery...

**Do you remember that moment, geshe la?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**And whenever Riccardo traveled through Kathmandu, you met, I imagine...**

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

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

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





"Riccardo and I have confidence in each other."

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

Lodoe: This year was the fifth, or the sixth time.

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

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

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

**What was the topic of the teaching this year?**

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

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







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

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

Oh, I do.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

*Photos: Geshe Lodoe Tsukphud, Riccardo Vrech, Jitka Polanska*