We are dedicated to a non-sectarian view of the Dharma, promoting also Bön, says founder of RIMÉ Association

written by Jitka Polanská



Paolo Roberti di Sarsina is a long-time dzogchen practitioner, a disciple of Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche. A year and a half ago he founded RIMÉ Association in Bologna, Italy, dedicated to spreading and promoting an atmosphere of tolerance and respect between various schools and traditions of Tibetan (and non-Tibetan) Buddhism. The name of the association – RIMÉ – recalls the non-sectarian movement started in the 19th century in Tibet to which the great dzogchen master of the Bön tradition, Sharzda Tashi Gyaltsen, belonged.

Paolo, since when have you been following Dharma?

I took refuge in 1982 in Pomaia, at the Lama Tzong Khapa´s Institute, more than forty years ago, with His Holiness Dalailama, the first time he came to Italy. I had been interested in Buddhism for some time before; my father gave me the first tome of the UTET edition, a publishing house specializing in Buddhist texts, when I was still in high school. After taking refuge I followed the Gelug school, the Dalailama´s tradition. In 1995 I joined the Dzogchen Community of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu and I still belong to it today. With our Dzogchen community center, Gegenling, in

2010 we organized a teaching of the Master here in Bologna, where the oldest university in the world is located. On that occasion, Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche gave a master lecture on Tibetan medicine, a heritage of humanity. For this event, we obtained the patronage of His Holiness Dalailama, as well as the Italian Prime Minister´s.

How and when was your Rimé Association for the Non-Sectarian Practice, Promotion and Diffusion of Dharma born?

It was founded in February 2022, and inspired by our Master Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. He himself was a great exponent of non-sectarianism having received teachings from many lineages.

There is a story that illustrates his open attitude. In 1988, he was invited to the famous conference of several masters from various schools and lineages organized by His Holiness Dalailama. Everyone had to have a 'badge' indicating an affiliation to a school. But the Master was not easily classified. When they wanted to write 'Sakya' on it, he said 'I am not Sakya though', and this even if he was very connected to that school. "So Nyingmapa, maybe?" they asked him, knowing of him being close to that school. "Not even," he replied. "I am a dzogchen master and I am not from one side," he added. And that is non-sectarian: include everything in one's mind. It is wonderful!



Paolo Roberti di Sarsina con Federico Ballarin and Clara Lovisetti, dzogchen practitioners and translators of teachings by Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche and other Shenten lamas.

"Rimé" is a movement established in the 19th century in Tibet. The great Bön master, Shardza Tashi Gyaltsen (1859-1934) was a Rimé exponent. Can you tell us something about the origins and purpose of the initiative?

The ‘ris med’ movement had two main creators: Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye (1813-1899) and Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (1820-1892). The name derives from the Tibetan words ris (sectarianism) and med (refutation) and literally means ‘without sides’, hence ‘non-sectarian’. The movement emphasized the unity of the different Dharma transmissions and the need to go beyond all sectarianism. It inspired a great spiritual rebirth. It referred back to the original sources of the Dharma teachings and aimed to transmit and teach the multiformity of lineages while preserving their variety.

The movement and especially its principles still inspire the dialogue among the different Tibetan religious schools, right?

Yes, they do. The greatest contemporary exponent of the ´Rimé’ is certainly His Holiness Dalailama. On our website you can find, for example, the transcript of His Holiness’ speech at the Twelfth Rimé Conference held in Dharamsala in 2015 where he, among other things, talks about the distances and mistrust bridged between the Gelug School and the Bön.

RIMÉ Association tries to find and connect examples of the non-sectarian approach to the Dharma in the West…

Yes, we have set up the ‘Rimé Network’, which is a voluntary collaborative network of Dharma centers that share a non-sectarian view. The idea is to join forces in the promotion of events, whether they are organized by the centers themselves, by our association or our center, Gelegling. The network currently includes six centers, including ours. Two of them are Bön: Ligmincha Italia and Kunsang Gar Meditation Centre of Geshe Dangsong Namgyal, located in California.

I would like to mention here how much Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche studied and researched Bön. In light of his close and highly respectful relationship with Yongdzin Lopon Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche, he invited him in 1997 to Merigar to transmit the Yetri Thasel´s dzogchen cycle.

In addition to setting up the network, you organize various events of different schools of Dharma. This year, a few of them have been related to Bön. Can you list them?

Last July, we had the honor of receiving teachings from Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche. A big part of the group took refuge with him and Rinpoche accepted our invitation to return next year. On that occasion, I expressed my hope to Rinpoche that the Congregation of Shenten Dargye Ling would like to support us.





During the retreat with Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche, in July 2023…

In September, we will collaborate with Ligmincha Italy for a retreat with Menri Ponlop Trinley Nyima Rinpoche. We also had an online presentation of the book on the life of Khenpo Gelek Jinpa, written by Anne Brunila and based on Khenpo's account, and in October, there will be a presentation of the translation of the book by Alejandro Chaoul, disciple of Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, on the Tibetan yoga.

Our idea and ambition is to establish the first Dharma center in Italy exclusively dedicated to promoting the non-sectarian movement, disseminating information and organizing events from various schools and lineages.

Besides connecting Dharma centers, as an association, you offer an opportunity to become members to Dharma practitioners. Which benefits does the membership bring?

Currently, we have eighty members. We provide them with information on events organized by us and beyond. Our website, which is continuously updated, presents various interesting materials including the history of the original Rimé movement. We try to create a community of members respectful of the various traditions and schools, although this does not mean eclecticism but rather a harmony within a diversity.

The retreats you organize at Bologna have a splendid setting in the Hermitage of Ronzano, a monastery founded in the 12th century in the hills of Bologna. The Hermitage is a few minutes' drive from the city center, yet still isolated. How did you find this beautiful place?

The Hermitage belongs to the Order of the Servants of Mary and is run by lay volunteers. Various activities and events are hosted there, but only those which the prior finds trustable. We have built up a very good relationship with the people in charge over time. It is truly a beautiful place. Khenchen Rinpoche and Geshe Samten liked it very much.



Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung, Geshe Samten and Alexander Pincin at Eremo di Ronzano.


Eremo di Ronzano is surrounded by beautiful and rich vegetation.

Paolo, could you tell us something about your professional background?

I graduated in Medicine at the University of Bologna in 1979 with a thesis on yoga therapy. In 1983, I specialized in psychiatry, also at the University of Bologna, and worked as a psychiatrist and psychotherapist. For several decades, I have been committed to promoting the centrality of the person in healthcare and have organized various initiatives in this field, including a National Symposium at the Senate in Rome, in 2016.

You are president of the Foundation for Salutogenesis. Can you explain what the word means and what you are involved in?

The term Salutogenesis is formed from the Latin word salus, salutis – health, and the Greek word genesis – origin, beginning, derivation. It is a neologism coined by an Israeli sociologist, Aaron Antonovsky. Salutogenesis is everything that creates health, enables people, even in situations of great adversity (trauma, chronic illness, disability, poor socio-economic conditions), to make choices that lead to health, using their internal and external resources.

Salutogenesis, therefore, deals with the 'causes', or rather the 'sources', of health. For us, it is the reference model for the promotion of health. For me, at the center of the health care process must always be the person, the patient.

Many valuable information can be found on the website of RIMÉ Association: https://www.associazionerime.org/

Pictures: Jitka Polanská