

First Communication Course for Instructors at Dzamling Gar

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Communication Course with Gianfranco Brero March 1-10, 2016

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Recently all the instructors in the International Dzogchen Community were asked to take a communication course with Gianfranco Brero, a long time student and actor from the Peruvian Dzogchen Community. At first, I didn't realize that this was something I needed to do, but then I thought, "Well, this could be useful." I didn't realize how useful it was going to be.



1st Group

Before becoming a Vajra Dance instructor for the UK, I had not done any public speaking since school days. Each person would be asked to present something in front of the class and we would each watch as one student after another went up to stand at the front, clutching a piece of paper

which would shake as they spoke. This is what I remember watching – not the content of what I was listening to.

Showing us by example and through watching others, Gianfranco demonstrated how body language is the most important thing when we are trying to communicate something. Just because we know about something well, and may be able to write about it, does not mean that we are going to be able to get that message across when we stand up to speak. We need to learn how to do it, just like anything else, and then practice until it becomes natural.

The first day was spent as one group of 24, while Gianfranco went through some of the theory of communication. We also watched each other trying to sell themselves, and we were asked whom would we buy and why. This was the platform for the next 3 days' proceedings, where we were asked to present 5-10 minutes in our groups of between 10 and 12 about our subject: Vajra Dance, Yantra Yoga, or Santi Maha Sangha, and then Gianfranco would work with us individually while the rest of the group contributed their comments.



2nd Group

Certain ideas were given to focus us on our task. What were we presenting, to whom and, most importantly, for what? This last question was like creating the bodhicitta of intention at the beginning – checking your intention was not to astound the audience with your knowledge but to

make them feel inspired and confident to take part, for example.

We were given indications about how to work with our body language by using the eyes to look at people directly, with the idea that we are never communicating to a group but to a group of individuals; we observed how a firm stance communicates a state of ease and confidence better; we learned how low status and high status shows itself and how to use these to effect; we learned how to work and master the space and use our hands in an expressive manner.

Also we learned about our content – the text. We learned the importance of fluency and to prepare beforehand. We also found how to use emphasis and pauses for dramatic effect so as to not lose people's attention. We learned about oral, visual and experiential ways to communicate and observed these methods working.

At one point during my turn, I felt like an entertainer, which Gianfranco affirmed. I realized the freedom of trying out different 'personalities' if they are better for communicating at that moment, rather than being attached to one that may not be so useful in that instant. For the first time since the shaky school days, I entertained the possibility that I might actually be able to enjoy public speaking!

On the third day we went into a little more detail about the teaching process, for example, how to listen to our students and offer positive 'reinforcement' before answering.



3rd Group

There were also some interesting reflections that came about through our work together. How when we are in the prominent position at a public event we need to command the space for everyone's benefit. As Gianfranco said, "Don't be afraid of the public. You dominate the space. The space belongs to you. You are the authority."

We also experienced how the timing and rhythm of the speakers breathing is the timing and rhythm of the audience's breathing, so we learned to take care of our breathing, using pauses. This also brought in a dramatic, emotional element rather than just appealing to the intellect.



4th Group

For me, I learned the importance of preparing well beforehand. I experienced how while presenting something in public, it is not appropriate to reflect and hesitate. As Gianfranco said to me, "When you are leading the session, in that moment is not the time to think, reflect, etc. Now is the time to give the information."

Thank you to our Master, the Community and Gianfranco for giving us this perfectly tailored opportunity to acquire some sorely needed skills, and to learn more about ourselves and others when it comes to communication. I would really encourage all the Community's instructors to take part. You will learn a lot and you will have a lot of fun!

