

The Heart of Khaita Joyful Dances

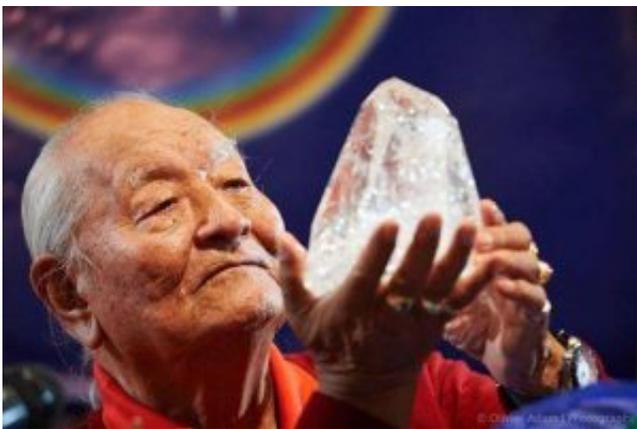
Date : June 19, 2019

By Adriana Dal Borgo

Among the many precious methods he offered us, in 2011 our beloved Teacher, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, gave us “Harmony in Space” or Khaita”, singing and dancing what, from an ordinary or dualistic point of view, are considered Tibetan folk songs and dances. Several times the Maestro explained their meaning from the point of view of the practice as if we had not been able to understand him, seeing with how much effort, for years, he dedicated his days to select and collect the songs and to work together with us on the dances; or as if his presence had not been enough at the daily Khaita sessions, in which he participated punctually until the end.

Some of our Teacher’s words on the meaning of Khaita, during a teaching given at Merigar East, August 2015 :

“Then there is energy that is called dang (gdangs). Dang in Tibetan has many meanings. For example, if we are not talking about Dzogchen Teaching, in ordinary Tibetan language the word dang means melody so when we sing a song we say dang. When people do a puja, the different ways of chanting are also called dang. So we should understand that. Sometimes in Vajrayana Teaching they also use dang to describe the way energy manifests. The word always means energy although there are not three divisions.



In Dzogchen Teaching, dang means the way our energy manifests when we are in the state of contemplation. Rolpa or tsal energy do not necessarily have to manifest. We are in the state of contemplation without even a concept of energy, just that is the state of contemplation. But how can other people discover our condition? If we are in the state of contemplation without moving, they might think that we are doing meditation. However, in Dzogchen Teaching we can also be in

the state of contemplation without necessarily remaining in a position, just like when we are dancing ordinary dances like Khaita dances. If we are Dzogchen practitioners, we know very well how to be in the state of contemplation and integrate with movement and at that moment no one knows we are doing meditation. They only think that we are doing ordinary dances.

When someone does Vajra Dance, people think that since it is a kind of teaching, it is a little better than Khaita dance. From a dualistic point of view Khaita dances are ordinary dances. We cannot do these kinds of dances in a monastery where they are forbidden and always considered negative. But for a Dzogchen practitioner, movement is part of our real nature. We need to integrate not only the calm state, emptiness, but also movement. This is most important in Dzogchen. The way of seeing of ordinary people is very different. (In Dzogchen) we cannot say about anything, “Oh, this is the only way (of manifesting)”. So that (energy or way of manifesting) is called dang.

What example can we give to make people understand dang? If we have a crystal ball and look into it, there is no color, there is no form, nothing. It is only clear, pure and limpid. If we put this crystal ball on a table with a red surface, the crystal ball will be red when we look at it. Why? Because the surface of the table is red. This is our idea, but it is only what we see. For example, if someone is in the meditation position we cannot really see the state of contemplation of that person, only the figure manifesting a meditation position. However, we judge and think that that person is doing meditation. If they are dancing Khaita dances, they are dancing, not meditating, just like when the crystal rock manifests the color of the table top. However, the crystal rock doesn't change at all. It is always clear, pure and limpid. That means when we are in the state of contemplation in a perfect way people may see it differently and have different judgements. This characteristic energy is called dang.”

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu August 6, 2015, Merigar East.
From 'The Mirror of Vajrasattva Retreat, Longsal Dorsem Melong'

We can use different interpretations to understand the meaning and the value of Khaita – Harmony in Space and its possible developments. The first concerns the innermost aspect linked to the transmission of our Teacher, in which Khaita is one of the practices of the Dzogchen Community. This aspect appears in Rinpoche's words above.

Another interpretation is related to the cultural value and includes the great work of the Maestro on the texts and so on. At the center of this there is the concept of modern Tibetan songs and dances. Thirdly there is the external-informative aspect: demonstrations, shows, street parades, use in educational courses.

This third part includes our participation with a **45-minute performance at the Dance Festival organized by Il Salterio in Brescia, Italy.**



Photos by Paolo Fassoli

“The colors and the harmonious rhythm or beat of the Khaita Joyful Dances thrilled the audience one beautiful summer evening at the Castelli Park in Brescia, Italy where every year the “Il Salterio” Association hosts music and dances from all over the world.

The Atiyoga Foundation and the Dzogchen Community were presented with simple but precise references to their founder, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu.

The dance show was introduced with some explanations of the meaning, the importance and actuality of the Tibetan cultural tradition, expressed poetically in the gestures and words of the lyrics of the songs.

The dancers, concentrated and excited, were on stage for about an hour and continued to dance with enthusiasm together with an involved audience until the end of the evening.

Thank you to all the people who brought this about with great commitment!”

Milena Serena



I would like to share some thoughts regarding the performance of Khaita Joyful Dances in Brescia, which took place last June 2nd. What I would like to present here is the point of view of the organization, which had already started last autumn shortly after receiving the invitation from Ezio Cammarata, the coordinator of the Il Salterio group.

When there is an event or show to prepare, identifying the goal to be achieved is relatively simple; but how to achieve it passes through a series of challenges and processes that are not always easy and immediate, especially for us who are not professional dancers and have to acquire the know-how of the organization over time and with experience.

The main aspect when preparing a show is to do our best according to our skills and abilities, without resorting to professionals in the sector, always remembering the principles of the teaching: from the beginning to the end, every stage of preparation, every workout, every movement during the dances and every result or difficulty are steeped in the presence of our Teacher, they are our Guru Yoga and contain a constant gratitude for having the possibility to carry on this activity.

The classical methods of preparing dancers require strenuous discipline and countless hours of training. For us they are difficult to apply, a little for individual circumstances (everyone has a job

and often other commitments with the Community, we live in places far from each other), but also because for some secret reason they are almost 'incomprehensible'. Our intense training is the one matured during these years during hundreds of hours of dance together with the Maestro, where finally being in unison – wonderful dancing in synchrony, the manifestation of the mandala, the pure dimension – was the fruit of training, but it was also completed by being present, or at least by an attitude aimed at being present. This is the heart of Joyful Dances: their quality and strength comes only in part from the technique, it also arises from personal practice.



What does it mean to apply teaching in these situations, during the organization and then while dancing? Does it mean observing oneself continuously, noticing and working with the manifestations of one's ego ("Is my movement not already perfect? ??Why do I have to change it? Who decides? My proposed idea is better!"), dissolving inevitable tensions, and respecting the point of view and the needs of others without losing sight of the common goal. Being aware and working with constantly changing circumstances is just like being able to adapt our steps and movements to the different rhythms of dances. All this can be condensed into one simple but profound word, which we have heard spoken so many times: being present in the relative condition in which we live and collaborating!

In the preparation of an event we can identify different phases. At the beginning we need to understand the context in which the performance will take place (venue, type of space, characteristics of the event) and define its duration together with the organizers. This creates a first idea of how the performance could be, a basic scheme that could still change later, but which at the beginning serves to define the work. On this basis a schedule is created (choice and order of the dances). For the show in Brescia, Salima and I worked on this, modifying the schedule several times before it took its final shape.

The second phase includes the choice of dancers, the definition of the place of rehearsals and the planning, in broad terms, of movements and accommodation during rehearsals and at the place of the show. In this case the choice of dancers was made by Salima and myself based on their experience and harmony in movements, but also on their willingness to dedicate time and resources to this project. We identified a dozen dancers.

For the logistical aspects, the Merigar Gakyil kindly made available the Mandala Room for training, some places in the dormitory for dancers and the kitchen space to have our lunches.

In this phase Luna Lattarulo's collaboration was crucial, offering her time and great organizational skills with kindness and generosity: she helped me for example to create a first indicative budget of the event, it was the bridge in communication both with the Gakyil of Merigar that with the Community of Brescia, since it also served on-site support during the show weekend. She also coordinated the accommodations and spaces during the rehearsal period at Merigar.



Another important aspect to take care of was the costumes: you have to choose and prepare suitable costumes. For this occasion we used new colored skirts, a project I worked on last year, all “made in Italy”, indeed “made in Venice”, because I used suppliers and seamstresses from the Veneto region. Other garments and ornaments were sent from the Khaita wardrobe at Dzamling Gar.

And then we arrived at the countdown for the Brescia show.

– 1 month before the performance: we send the show lineup to the members of our group so that they can start preparing, especially the most complex dances but ... some dancers announce that they will not be able to participate! The unexpected has arrived – how do you do it? Let’s try to look for substitutes but it’s a little late, too little time to get organized.

– 2 weeks before: training starts at Merigar, every session starts with Guru Yoga and ends with the dedication of merits. We wanted to have enough time, two whole weeks, to coordinate, to be able to train and create together a harmonious performance without leaving details to chance or haste. It was not always easy to find a satisfactory balance for everyone between discipline and individual needs, but this too was part of our practice.

We are only 9 now, for the dances with couples we include Fulvio, our 10th dancer. The choice

naturally arises: Fulvio lives in Brescia, he created the connection with the Il Salterio group and has repeatedly danced Khaita with them.

Between rehearsals, I build the text of the presentation and the outline of the evening. Another small unexpected thing: our presenter on stage must be rethought. Migi will do it, a passionate Khaita dancer who leads the dances at the Ling in Brescia and also during some lessons at Il Salterio.

– 1 week before: during the weekend the Mandala Room is occupied but the Municipality kindly provided us with the Arcidosso theater. I thank Elisa for the contact, the librarian Adriano and the technician Alessandro for patiently introducing me to the secrets of the theater: for example, how to turn on the different lights or make the audio work. A theater is a mysterious and fascinating place, a space where many stories come to life, generations meet. For me it was exciting to keep the 'keys' for a few days, to open the space, initially dark and cold, to the rehearsals and see it fill with music, light and the energy of the Khaita dancers.



Photo by Alfredo Colitto

Christiane and Giovanna come to see us and, above all, to give us a hand to coordinate the group with an “external” view, they observe us with a critical but benevolent eye and give precious comments and suggestions.

– 4 days before, Merigar rehearsal with costumes: Rosa Namkhai honors us with her presence and points out an unforgivable forgetfulness: we had coordinated all the passages between one dance and another but not the final greeting! We organize ourselves a moment, and in two minutes we create the conclusion of the show.

– 2 days before: the fatigue of the long journey (7 hours in the car) melts in the warm and exciting welcome from the Dzogchen Community of Brescia. We are soon refreshed by a delicious welcome dinner, prepared thanks to the collaboration of all of them.

– 1 day before: test on the scene to test the spaces and the floor, the tightness of the new shoes, the sound, the lights, to define the last details and the dress rehearsal of the presentation. Rereading the written text, I realize only now that it must necessarily be modeled on the ‘spoken’ presentation: so Migi, Mariangela and Milena help me to see it again and we try it together, also building intonations of the voice, pauses, to make it more interesting to the public. The day ends by participating in the cheerful activities of the festival together with the dancers of Il Salterio.

– Sunday arrives: we allow ourselves the first part of the day to rest, recover the hours of sleep that some of us have lost the night before, arrange the costumes, check makeup, hairpins and accessories.

– In the evening, the few hours before starting are as always exciting for fear of forgetting something. Let’s go over the order of the performance: presentation, first part of dance, we arrange the kadag on stage ready for Migi and Mariangela who will hand them over, Milena will take care of moving the guitars of the boys, Laura ready to start the music together with the technician Alberto, we define the lights, I coordinate with Ezio how to lead, at the end of the performances, the dance part with the public. Spartaco comes from Padua to help out with the video footage, Paolo indulges himself with the photos, all the other Brescia practitioners arrive who make us feel ‘at home’: there is a party atmosphere, joy, we don’t lose presence and we offer every moment and emotion to the Source of Khaita.

The previous group finishes, Ezio introduces us, Migi gets on to the stage: the show begins and the rest you can watch in the video!