

Memories of Latvia

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The Development of Dzogchen Teaching and Vajra Dance in the Baltic States

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Rinpoche's arrival in Riga, Latvia in 1992

In 1990 I had just become a Buddhist following my friends, and soon after Fabio Andrico appeared in 1991 and showed us Yantra Yoga. It seemed that only our children were good at the exercises; our own bodies were clumsy and did not obey.

The new Buddhist community, which was hardly formed, split into two. In 1992, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu made his first tour through the territory of the former USSR, beginning with Lithuania. After the Vilnius retreat, Rinpoche put a condition about coming to Latvia, and that was that he would only come if the two divided Buddhist groups came together again. Thanks to their leaders, they promised to reunite, and so they did.

It was decided to hold a retreat in a coastal resort town called Jurmala, on the Baltic Sea beach, in a former military sanatorium. The sessions took place in the so-called Winter Garden. From the beginning I felt that this teaching was for me, but it was challenging since there were so many unknown words and concepts, and a lot of running back and forth between the retreat in Jurmala and my job in Riga. While Rinpoche was speaking, sometimes I would fall asleep, and my head would fall on the cactus. I would wake up and listen again with double the attention.



Retreatants with Chögyal Namkhai Norbu in Jurmala, Latvia 1992



Rinpoche dancing in Jurmala, Latvia 1992

At the end of the retreat I learned that dances on a Mandala exist. Here, the Mandala was drawn with colored chalk on the dance floor outside. The place was round in shape with a tree growing right in the center. There I saw for the very first time Rinpoche dancing with those who came with him: Fabio Andrico, Jim Valby, Martha Heinen and Naomi Zeitz.

A course on the Dance of the Song of the Vajra was organized, welcoming Adriana Dal Borgo to Vilnius in cold December 1994. It was the first opportunity for me and I was there. Back in Riga, we had enough room to draw a half of the Mandala, and in a hurry not to forget, we practiced the steps we had just learned.

After that there were all kind of things happening. For a while, almost all our Community was dancing, but after some time I was all alone. Then I was lucky and had some support from the dancers from Lithuania. Algis, a Vajra Dance instructor, was at the helm. They would come to dance with me on weekends. After sometime Liga Z. came, and she fell in love with the Vajra Dance. Now there were two of us.



Rinpoche teaching the Vajra Dance in Jurmala, Latvia 1992

Then some people started to dance in Daugavpils. I went there to dance on weekends, alone or two of us together. And so it was until Alar Kukk, another Vajra Dance instructor, appeared in Estonia, and now all of us, from Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, come together at least twice a year in Riga (on Rinpoche's birthday and the International Vajra Dance day) for a Dance retreat, and we enjoy these meetings greatly. New people come on the Mandala, and some of the "old dancers" came back. All in all, we are not so many as in the beginning, but I'm not alone anymore. The Dances are going on and we try to dance twice a week.



Author and friends in 1992

There is a Stupa here near Riga, built by the Drigung Kagyu Community. They invited us to dance at the inauguration of the Stupa and we performed the Dance for the Benefit of All Living Beings. The people there were so touched, they now try to organize the conditions to dance by themselves. It's not there yet, but the process began. And all of this is thanks to our Teacher Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. I'm enjoying these precious gifts and I don't even want to think how my life would be if we had not met in 1992.