

About the Supervisions of Yantra Yoga, Interview with Laura Evangelisti

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The Mirror: Can you tell us the history of how supervisions began, their function and what they mean in terms of the continuation of Rinpoche's lineage of Yantra Yoga?

Laura Evangelisti: This system of supervising people who feel they are ready to become instructors started in 1995. In December of 1994, Rinpoche sent a letter to all Gakyils and Fabio and me, saying that he decided to have four people responsible, two for Vajra Dance and two for

Yantra Yoga. For Vajra Dance the two people are Prima Mai and Adriana Dal Borgo and for Yantra Yoga are Fabio Andrico and myself.

Rinpoche wrote a letter to the Gakyils and also guidelines on how to proceed with this system of training prospective teachers of Yantra Yoga and Vajra Dance. Rinpoche advised Fabio and me to lead teacher trainings for all Yantra Yoga practitioners and to make sure that Yantra Yoga continued to be communicated and taught without changes or modifications.

At that time we were still working, although almost finished, on the translation of the original Yantra Yoga book that Rinpoche wrote with the root text and commentary, the [*Trulkhor Nyida Khajor*](#) by Vairocana, the root text, so that is why we went through many details with Adriano Clemente, the translator, and Rinpoche himself. We asked Rinpoche many questions and showed him the movements and he would correct us. We, Fabio, myself and Adriano, were mainly working with Rinpoche on the veranda of Merigar (West). The translation of the book had started already in the 1980's.

We went very carefully through the book, checking the root text and the commentary, and sometimes there was a slight discrepancy, Rinpoche would tell us we cannot change the root text at all, so if there is some small discrepancy, he told us to follow the root text.

So that is why Fabio and I became a little more expert, and also because we were already practicing Yantra Yoga. At that time there were already quite a few people teaching Yantra Yoga within our Dzogchen Community, because at that time Yantra Yoga was mostly taught within the Community. Some of the people who learned directly from Rinpoche when he was teaching in Naples started to teach.

After maybe ten or fifteen years Rinpoche started to notice that Yantra Yoga was being taught in different styles, so that is why he appointed Fabio and myself, since we had worked a lot on the book directly with Rinpoche and Adriano, of course. Rinpoche decided to appoint us as the supervisors of prospective teachers and also of the teachers who were already teaching. That was not easy because some people felt they knew better than we did.

M: Was the supervision/authorization situation in place yet?

LE: No, not yet. Rinpoche then told us that the people who want to teach have to follow a teacher training with me and Fabio, and then be supervised, meaning to organize a course in their own place or location, and we should go there and supervise how they teach. So this was in a very personal way. Then he said he would give them authorization when we presented them to him.

So from 1995 we started to lead the Teachers Trainings and we had the first Teacher Training in Merigar (West) in 1995. It was a two-week teacher training and we went through all the Yantras and it was very nice. We were very young also. These teacher trainings were attended by people

who had already been practicing Yantra Yoga for quite a long time.

The first people who were supervised were already people who had been in the Community for a long time, so the first authorization Rinpoche gave was in Margarita in 2002. So after this first teacher training we started to travel around and supervise people who were organizing Yantra Yoga courses.

M: One reason we decided to do this interview was to explain the value of attending supervision classes for people interested in Yantra Yoga to learn from the base, for new people as well as experienced ones, and also for aspiring teachers. Can you talk a little about that?

LE: First let's give some background. When we do teachers trainings we usually have limited time for different reasons. One is that people cannot take long periods of time off work and if it is too long it becomes too expensive, so usually our teacher trainings are ten days long. In the beginning, the people who were participating and willing to become Yantra Yoga instructors were very different, people who were old practitioners and we were already familiar with. Now there are people we do not know, and they have been learning Yantra Yoga for not such a long time, maybe only a couple of years, but it takes quite a long time to really integrate the practice of Yantra Yoga in oneself; to go really deeply into the practice.

So there are many different levels when we do teacher trainings and since the teacher trainings are not very long, we do not have the time to go into the didactics, how to teach, etc, so that is something we have to develop. What I am doing more and more during supervisions with aspiring teachers is collaborate. The aspiring teacher leads the course, but we collaborate. That means that when there is something to add that they don't explain, I do. Also sometimes I correct. I cannot do too much correction, especially because when we do first level supervisions the courses are open so new people come.

That is actually the most difficult situation. To teach to completely new people and to really communicate something to them about the essence of Yantra Yoga or what Yantra Yoga is about is not so easy. That is why I usually have to add a lot. So, I do not say don't do like this or that, also for people attending the course it is not the nicest way. So that is the collaboration and people find this very useful; the people attending are guided by people who are not so experienced, but they have the chance to meet and learn from us who have more experience. I think it is quite useful for people who participate in a supervision course.



Supervision at Merigar West

If there are too many things I have to correct, I usually do that after the class, privately, or at the end of the course, or the end of the day, I correct and I register everything in my mind and sometimes people ask how I can remember what they did with their knees, but for me it is quite natural.

I also like to collaborate with prospective instructors at supervision courses because I like to talk with them on a personal level, to have some kind of relationship, to know each other; during a teacher training there are too many people for us to get to know everyone. But during supervision courses we enter in a very close relationship and this is very nice.

Of course, the day before supervision starts many people are kind of nervous and afraid and I know sometimes I can quite strong, but I always say this is a way for us to collaborate, so that is

also very important on the personal and very human level. I also like to develop this, not only to be seen as the main teachers, something like that.

M: Can you explain the different levels of Yantra Yoga?

LE: We have three levels. First, second and third levels. The first level supervisions and courses can be more open because that is about the five series of Yantras mainly, and the first and second series pranayamas. The second level is more in depth for the Yantras of the third, fourth and fifth series, but especially the pranayamas of the third, fourth and fifth series, which are very profound methods. The second level we can only teach to people who have transmission. Then the third level supervision we only did once, we don't have many people who reach that level. The third level comprises everything, not only the five basic Yantras and the pranayamas, but also all the movements, the twenty-five movements for training and progressing, which are quite difficult, many of them but not all, and the seven lotuses. Up to now we only did one complete third level teacher training, so we have a lot to do. I hope we will be able to do more and have more committed teachers.



Kumar Kumari Authorization at Dzamling Gar

One more thing I would like to say, especially for first level supervisions, we don't know the people so well who we are going to supervise because maybe we only saw them in one or two Teacher's Training. In the beginning it was very easy because we knew the people very well, but nowadays the Community is so big, so often we do not know people very well. So I prefer when I have time, and I have more time than Fabio, to go locally. That is very important for me to see how a person teaches in the place where this person will teach with local people. Also to see how a person organizes, their capacity to organize, also the attitude of the person in a place, which is not a Gar. It is very different.

For me it is very important to see how a person is in his or her own place. It is not only about how much people know about Yantra Yoga but also the attitude towards people, with the organization, there are many aspects. I prefer to do the first part of the first supervision locally, when possible. At the beginning Rinpoche asked us to go locally.

In some countries it is very difficult and there are many people, so sometimes we do the supervisions in the Gars; not only with one person but possibly with two to maximum six people. Larger groups are a bit too much to be able to focus on each candidate.

Also another important aspect is that the Gakyils should collaborate with the prospective teachers, sometimes it is not easy to organize a course, and that is another point to observe, how the person collaborates with the Gakyil, and vice versa of course, but also the attitude towards the Gakyil, and towards the Community in general. That is very important. It is also important that the Gakyil supports the training of the people, when really needed they can even support economically, because the teachers benefit the Community locally.

M: Do you think it is also useful for aspiring teachers to attend supervisions?

LE: Yes I think this is very important and useful because if someone wants to organize a supervision course for themselves I really advise them to participate in a supervision course before so they can know what it is about, what to expect and they can correct many details and they can see what is indispensable during a supervision. It is also helpful for those who want to be supervised to see what it really means to be an instructor.

M: What kind of advice do you have for people who are interested in becoming Yantra Yoga instructors?

LE: The best way is to start by taking regular courses with our instructors, and then when one feels quite stable in the personal practice, they can participate in a teacher training. It is better to attend more than one teacher training, but sometimes we do not have that possibility. Then before

presenting themselves to be supervised, they continue with their personal practice and collaborate with our instructors and be pre-supervised by our instructors. That is very important.

So, for example, one thing that is often lacking is to know how to teach and how to lead a class, because if you are not an authorized teacher you cannot teach. That is why it is very useful if you can collaborate, participate in regular courses with an instructor, sometimes help or guide, this is very useful and I really hope that in the future the people who want to present themselves to be supervised will do this, because it is not enough to attend one teacher training and practice only personally.

M: What can you recommend to people who live far from a center or local instructors, or people who are not really involved in the Community, who have another kind of yoga practice, but are interested to become a Yantra Yoga instructor?

LE: Up until now our first level instructors need to be members of the Dzogchen Community. If they do not have any instructor to work closely with, they should attend weekend or intensive courses with authorized instructors. Of course they can also start to practice to lead with some close friends, or with people from the Community, or for example, invite an instructor to give an intensive course of one weekend where they live. And when the instructor leaves they can lead regular practices based on what the local instructor has been teaching. That is a way to continue.

People need to train on how to introduce Yantra Yoga. What to say to introduce Yantra Yoga, especially to new people, is missing in the supervisions; the important things to say and what not to say. It is important to introduce in a very simple and accessible way.

M: Are you and Fabio planning to come up with some kind of way or training for just this?

LE: Well one way someone can do is to attend a beginner's course with an experienced instructor, so you see how the instructor introduces. Of course we could develop more this aspect of how to communicate. We have the communication courses with Gianfranco, which are very useful for instructors at the level of how to not be shy, how to use the body and how to look at people. Content that is another thing, so we may have to develop that part. Maybe it would be useful if people who want to be supervised were required take at least one beginner's course.

M: There was a certain aim you had in talking to The Mirror about supervisions and informing the readers about supervisions in Yantra Yoga. Do you want to summarize what that is?

LE: I wanted to do this interview to make people understand the importance of supervision. That has been my main focus and that is what Rinpoche asked me to do, to form new instructors, and I have been dedicating to this, so now I feel I have developed some capacity to collaborate and help people to become Yantra Yoga instructors through these supervision courses.

Of course I hope in the future we will have other people to help us do this. A couple of years ago Fabio asked Rinpoche if someone else could do the supervision courses and Rinpoche said no, the two of us should continue to do that. So I do my best to continue to do that. We hope more and more people will commit to become instructors. Of course it requires a lot of time.

Another thing I would like to say regarding candidates is that even if someone is super flexible and they maybe do a lot of hatha yoga, they may miss the capacity to collaborate with the people in front of them. So personally I prefer someone is maybe not super, hyper flexible, or doing all kinds of positions in a perfect way, but they have the capacity to really help people. You should have the capacity to really help people – to understand what they are doing and how they are doing it. Also the attitude of how you present yourself in front of people, it is important to be not too shy or too self-effacing, but to be humble and open, not to present yourself as if you are someone special in the sense of feeling superior or whatever.

M: How has the experience of supervising impacted your practice of Yantra Yoga?

LE: I learn a lot about how to teach. Also going into details I learn more and also I see that maybe something that is obvious to me is not so to others. I have learned to go deeper into the capacity to explain, being more precise, and going into details. I have also learned on the personal level, how to deal with people, because sometimes you need a lot of patience, and that is very useful, and then also you have to correct people and sometimes that is not easy depending on the person you have in front. Some people accept to be corrected and some people don't. I have also had a few very challenging experiences especially when I have to tell someone they are not ready, that is not easy and not easy for the person, but it is also something for me to work on. I have a responsibility to present these people to Rinpoche, so for me this is a huge responsibility. We also have to make sure these people continue to do and teach Yantra Yoga in the correct way, without changing or modifying it. I still have to learn a lot, especially on this personal level.

So to finish I would like to say that to train instructors is a long process and not easy. At the end when we present the candidates in front of Rinpoche, it is the completion of our job and our commitment. I must say at this point there is a lot of satisfaction, usually Rinpoche is very happy whenever he sees the group of people practicing and presenting Yantra Yoga in front of him. That is a really wonderful experience for both Fabio and me and for the candidates. The fact that for now and for a long time ahead Rinpoche himself gives the diplomas is worth all the hard work.

M: Thank you Laura.

