

# **How I Met Chögyal Namkhai Norbu - Interview & Video with Fabio Andrico**

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Fabio with Rinpoche

*“You see Fabio, in life you do not need to renounce something, but should live everything with awareness.” Chögyal Namkhai Norbu*

**The Mirror:** Today is June 5th, 2022, and we are in Tenerife near Dzamling Gar, interviewing Fabio Andrico for The Mirror. Fabio is one of the two main international Yantra Yoga instructors, a Santi Maha Sangha instructor and a long-time practitioner. Fabio also spent many years traveling with Rinpoche as his travel assistant. So we are honored to be able to interview him about his life and experience, about how he came to the teachings originally and if he wants to tell us some special anecdotes or stories about his very fortunate life with Rinpoche.

Hi, Fabio. Would you like to tell us a little bit about your earlier life and what led you to the teachings?

**Fabio Andrico:** A little bit, but very synthetic, otherwise it will take many hours.

I was in Italy, doing not very many things in the period just before, and somebody invited me to go to India. It's not very interesting to elaborate on what was my life. The point is that person told me that she would like me to go with her – she was not my girlfriend, she was a girlfriend of a friend of mine – and she said she would pay for everything; she was from a rich family from Peru, her father had a pharmaceutical company. I asked her, like in the movies, ‘Why me?’ And she told me ‘Because you are the only male I know who doesn't create the problem of the male for me.’ I said, ‘Ok, fine, no problem.’ She told me, ‘I can pay your flight, the return flight too, and I can give you 500\$,’ – that at that time was like 2000\$ now. -‘Would you come?’ ‘Let me think about it – yes’.

**M:** What year was that?

**F:** I was twenty years old, it was a long time ago. And so we went. We arrived in Delhi and from Delhi we went to Goa. The beach and things – people in Goa did many other things, at least at that time. And I was actually horrified at these people doing drugs at the level where they were absolutely in bad situations. I was doing some of these things before – smoking things and doing things. I already decided that I would stop but when I saw these people in that kind of condition, I thought ‘That's really it. I don't want to waste my life.’ These people were just wasting their life, really terrible.

Anyway, there I met an Italian there who had studied for quite some time in India at the ashram of the Satyananda tradition of yoga, and he said if we wanted we could go to his place because his Vedanta teacher just died not long before and we could go and practice yoga there; his yoga teacher was at the ashram in Bangalore.

**M:** Did you already study yoga?

**F:** I did a little bit with Mario Franchini, a friend who showed me something, I could do nauli, but not very much. But I was interested. So we went there and spent three or four months – the span of the possibility to stay with the Indian visa. It was in Bangalore, in an ashram. He was teaching some yoga and we were practicing.

I was kind of stiff because in the previous years I had worked on the farm. It was not really a hippy farm, we were only two people and some friends were coming. The idea was an art project, that our life was the art. So we were documenting our life, raising goats, making orchards and things.

We had a pig – originally she was small but then she was big, 240 kilos, – really she was a hog, called Rosella. She was so cute, this animal was so intelligent, so clean, really they are so clean. I was going in the mornings bringing her food like this [showing full hands], she was waiting, doing all these kinds of things like a dog. And then I was there scratching hair on her neck and she was going like this [shows movement up] because she wanted me to scratch her belly, it was so cute. Then I put her on a chain, because there were no other things, a big chain, I was opening the sty and then she would basically take me out because if 240 kilos are running, you go with it.

Then the life went on and the day they decided to make salami and prosciutto out of her I could not stand it and I left. When I was there I became vegetarian because when you see all these little cute little animals... I also had 25 rabbits. When they are small they are so cute, people are coming, 'This I called this, this I called that.' Then they become bigger and bigger and then 'Which one do we eat?' and then you have to kill them and I did not want to kill anything and so I became vegetarian. But I was not there when they decided to end the life of Rosella. I could not take it, honestly. But I said, 'I want to eat a little piece of the salami you are making with her.' Interesting, I just wanted to create a connection with her.

And I had my goats, I was milking my goats, I was making fresh cheese, ricotta, I was making jams and other things. And I was kind of strong, I would carry big pieces of wood like this [shows a big size] so my body was strong, my muscles were those kind of muscles. When I practiced yoga in India, my muscles changed, they become more elongated, more flexible. Seriously, in three or four months my body changed, becoming more slim and different. I couldn't do more than this [puts one leg on the knee of the other] and after that, in the last days, I was doing a lotus. We were fasting three-four days and then practicing four, five, or six days all the time. I think 55% of the time I was fasting and 45% I was eating, totally vegetarian. But then the body become very supple, and that's why I was practicing at least six to eight hours a day. That's why I know when people teach Yantra Yoga and they say, 'Oh, we can't,' I know it's just the matter of how much time you dedicate and how much intention you have to use it for that. Because I have my example, my body changed in three months. I went from nothing to be able to do a lotus.

And when I came back I basically decided to start teaching because I saw some people started

teaching, honestly, I knew better than them, even if I was not trained so much. I came back to Italy dressed all in white, with long hair, only vegetarian, some time only fruits, some time only one kind of fruit. My eyes were like this [shows big size]. And at a certain point I even had a beard so I looked like a yogi. My intention was to study medicine because I wanted to help people, cure people with naturopathic systems, yoga. That was my idea – to become that kind of doctor.

And then when I was there, Giuliano Casiraghi had already met Rinpoche and he told me, 'Oh, there is this Tibetan teacher who teaches advanced techniques of the breathing.' I said, 'What?!' Because I studied more asanas and things like this, I practiced a little of pranayamas, alternative nostril breathing, bhastrika, etc a little bit, I was mostly dedicated to the practice of asanas. So I was very interested in the advanced techniques of breathing. And so I went. That was Prata in 1977. I arrived there and Rinpoche gave many teachings, and at the end I decided that I really wanted to follow Rinpoche. So, instead of going to study medicine I did that. Before I had done the artistic high school, I had done two or three years of architecture. Then I wanted to change but to change I had to do an integrative year because I wanted to do medicine. But in the end after I did the integrative year I decided to go to Naples to the Oriental University and study with Rinpoche. So I studied Tibetan, Eastern religions and these kind of things.

Then I found myself going with Rinpoche when he went to Austria for the first time. I was staying around, in Naples, I was teaching yoga and painting houses to live, to pay for my life and my university. At a certain point I had sometimes 50 students because I was teaching at a beauty center and sometimes at the European Italian Yoga Federation. So I was teaching there and there were only women. Sometimes even 50 women came to my class and I would say, 'Well, I have to tell you that if you come to my class to learn yoga, that's ok, but if you come just to get skinny and have a more firm bottom, this is not the class for you.' Generally, 20 or 25 would leave the next month and find another class. Still these 25 remained stable for four years with me. Sometimes we were more, but never less than this number. Some of them would come even before for the class, so when I came they were already practicing for one hour.

When we went to Austria, there was one retreat in Vienna and one in the countryside. Rinpoche was teaching some Yantra Yoga. So I started learning yantra from Rinpoche and then Rinpoche authorized me to teach. Maybe because I was already practicing and teaching yoga, he gave me permission to teach there, so I started to teach yantra at the place of the Community called Parco Margarita in Naples. They were not called 'lings', they were places of the Community to practice together. In the morning I was teaching hatha yoga, and in the afternoon, yantra. I did that more or less for four years. Sometimes more hours, sometimes a little less. That's why, I think, that is my understanding, I started to understand, after three or four years, how yantra is working. That's why we try to explain as much as possible to shorten this period of time of having to discover by yourself, but it's not that somebody can do it for you; that does not exist. The only way to really understand how to practice yantra is by practicing it and discovering yourself how it works and so on and so on.

In the meantime, at a certain moment, Rinpoche gave me a diploma authorizing me to teach yantra from that moment. So that was the beginning, in Naples. Then I started to go to Rinpoche's retreats in the summers because the university had holidays and also the center was on holidays. So nine months a year I was working and studying and the rest of the year we were going to Rinpoche's retreats here and there and I started teaching some yantra at the retreats. After four years I finished the university. I also went to India to do my thesis, all these kinds of things, and then I came back. After a little while I went to live in Rome and I started to work making a documentary with Paolo Brunatto.

Then we started doing a project that we would go around to film where Rinpoche was giving retreats [ed. Lama Around the World]. After teaching for four years, hatha yoga in the morning, Yantra Yoga in the afternoon honestly, I had had enough. For one year I said basta, I don't want to hear about yoga, basta. But then during the retreats they were asking me to teach yantra and when we went around people were asking me to teach at retreats and so on. At a certain point I had to decide: if I was working I did not have time to go where they invited me. If I was going to where they invited me, I could not work. In the end, the situation came out that I started traveling with Rinpoche and became his travel assistant, because I was also going there and doing a retreat teaching yantra.

One year when Rinpoche was on retreat in Merigar, I went around by myself only. I went around the United States – Santa Fe, Oakland – Jim Raschik was organizing there – New Mexico, and maybe not many people know, I was also teaching Vajra Dance. In Venezuela I went to Merida with Carmen Rivas and we painted a mandala in the yard to do the Vajra Dance. Then came this fund for the teachers, it was more organized that the teacher should be paid, the expenses should be covered. Because the first year when Rinpoche was in retreat and I traveled by myself, and actually I used my own money to travel. I had a house that I sold that my father had left to me, so at that time I used my own money to travel.

Then I came back, the expenses were more organized, so I started to travel more to teach yantra, and then since it was useful that somebody traveled with Rinpoche. Once Rinpoche said, 'It's not that Fabio is my assistant, I am his secretary.' Something like this. I felt like [shows embarrassment]. Rinpoche was sort of saying he had to take care of me instead of me taking care of him. So I started traveling with Rinpoche and almost all the rest of the time I was doing that; more than 40 years all over the world.

Then I started to do the webcast. The first one was in the year 2000, the year when some people were thinking that doom was coming. And that we did by phone. Of course, in the beginning it was only audio. It was Jacqueline Gens who organized the provider in the United States. You connected the phone with them, and then they sent it in the web, something like this. That was the eve of year 2000 from Namgyalgar South, that does not exist anymore, the place was sold. That was the first webcast. Then I started to do these webcasts in this way in only audio, and the first attempt of doing it with video also was in Oakland, California, in the United States. Jey Clark tried

to organize that. It was a Mormon temple, which looked very impressive. They had two or three Macs lined up. They looked like NASA. They rented the satellite, and then they couldn't align the satellite and so it was the same thing: the video did not work, so it was still only audio. The satellite could not being aligned and so it was done in the same way. Also in Margarita, in Tashigar Norte,



**M:** Could you say if there was one thing, maybe one moment, in all your years with Rinpoche, that impacted you and left you with some way of approaching your life and practice?

**F:** Yes, one time he told me, after I had just let go of some of my tensions: “You see Fabio, in life you do not need to renounce something but should live everything with awareness.”

**M:** How do you feel things are going in the Community since Rinpoche passed away? What do you see happening or what might you hope for? And because of your experience with Rinpoche, what have you understood as his wish for us how we could carry on?

**F:** This is a complicated thing to answer because I can never pretend to know what was in Rinpoche’s mind. I know that most of the time he knew what was in my mind, and that was scary. I don’t know, I really can’t answer. The only thing that I understood is that the Community is about collaboration, about trying to understand each other and working together, to try that the teaching is understood and applied, also in the daily life of people who are not necessarily members of the Community or did not have the fortune of receiving Rinpoche’s transmission. The teaching should be good for humanity. Always Rinpoche said that peace should start from the individual, individual evolution. And if it works like this, this develops, then we can really have peace and harmony in the world. As I understand, his way of thinking was how the Community can benefit the wide world, because we are all human beings, we are all born in the dimension of this planet. But also, by extension, generally, with other beings, we also use respect and collaboration.

Regarding the more internal aspect of the Community, we know, the way I understood, whatever Rinpoche gave of the teachings connected with transmission, they are connected with transmission. So everybody can reflect by herself or himself about what that means. We should try to preserve the purity. Rinpoche created Santi Maha Sangha to help protect and continue his transmission, that was the purpose of Santi Maha Sangha. Because he said many times, ‘Not everybody needs to be a Santi Maha Sangha teacher or even to do Santi Maha Sangha because I am teaching everything anyway.’ But the people who want to take responsibility of Santi Maha Sangha, they have the responsibility of that, specifically.

So I don’t really know what I can say. All I can say is that the basic principle of the Community should be respect and collaboration. If there is not that, either internally or, if you want to make the distinction, externally, but if it is only internally, then it becomes a sect. This is not what Rinpoche ever thought, this I know. And external means integrating, externally. We are human beings, we are not different from other human beings. If we think we are different human beings with respect to other human beings.. we are all human beings. We have the fortune of receiving Rinpoche’s transmission. This is our personal evolution related to the teaching and the method that Rinpoche gave, the understanding and so on and so on. If we cannot apply it also in the normal life, not always between ourselves but really in normal life, I don’t think that was Rinpoche’s.. now people use very much this word – vision. When I think of Rinpoche’s vision I think of Rinpoche’s visions, but we are talking more of an idea how to continue in the future. It’s something beneficial for

humanity and humanity becomes more harmonious and then everything can be understood with awareness; we can treat nature, all beings and everything with awareness. So the base, as Rinpoche always said, is presence and awareness in daily life. That's what Rinpoche was teaching for everyone, not only for his disciples.

I understand like this. And then in practice how it becomes or does not become – that's another story. You cannot have anybody do it for you, it does not exist, it's not possible.

**M:** The way the things are going now, do you feel hopeful when you look around and see what's happening in the International Dzogchen Community? Do you have any concrete advice for how people might go ahead?

**F:** It's just what I said. Knowing that we are Vajra brothers and sisters but respect not only between ourselves, that would be already something very interesting. Also Rinpoche said one time in Hong Kong: 'You should not respect only me. You should respect everybody.' This was very clear: respect, awareness, being present, working with circumstances so that you can understand what can be done in circumstances. If some circumstances need to have rules, rules are part of the circumstances. Sometimes [people say], 'We are free, we are Dzogchen practitioners, we don't need rules.' But Rinpoche said that when he was in China, he followed all the rules, he was aware of the circumstances.

So, having no limitations, in my understanding, means you really know how to work. If you have to limit yourself, you have not the limitation of not limiting yourself. That's what I understood, in the normal life; if we talk about another dimension it is another story. I remember Rinpoche saying, everybody heard it, 'We have to keep our two feet on the ground.' Our two feet on the ground means we are on this earth, in this condition, that's our dimension now, and being aware means that. If we can follow these things and apply a little bit, whatever the future is I cannot see, things should be better for everyone. And maybe we would be able to do something good for not just the people of the Community. Because that was never my understanding of what Rinpoche taught.

For example, I remember, Rinpoche was not very keen on publicity in a sense of trying to convince somebody of something. But communicating the possibility of having some kind of understanding of something is another story. That is not conditioning people. He always said, 'If somebody is conditioning it means he is forcing something, constructing something. And if you construct something, sooner or later is going to fall down because it's false like blind faith or this kind of thing.' There should be understanding, comprehension. And then when you know something, nobody can strip it away from you because you know, you have that experience clearly, it's part of you. So, if we can try to apply this, also people who have received transmission, Rinpoche gave so many incredible teachings, all the time, one life time is not really enough. That is another dimension, everybody should look for himself or herself and apply whatever they want to apply and try to mature in the practice. But also the relationships with everyone is very important, applying collaboration and respect.

**M:** Thank you very much Fabio.

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