


By Dr. Rabin Man Shakya Edited by Kuon Hunt

Thursday, 2 December 2021

**“Sacred Dance of Nepal” Guest Lecture by Guruju
Prajwal Ratna Vajracharya**

In a Zoom guest lecture for the Department of Religious Studies and the Religious Studies Graduate Council of the University of the West in California, noted charya guru Vajracharya discussed the meaning, role and value of charya nritya in Newar Vajrayana Buddhism. The Sanskrit term “charya nritya” means dance as a spiritual discipline, said Rev Guru Vajracharya, adding that until recently this ancient dance tradition was unknown outside the circles of initiates who perform it.

"This sacred dance is one of the religious arts of the Tantric Buddhist priests of the Kathmandu valley who have performed it for centuries as part of their esoteric meditation and rituals. It is used to invoke their deities using prescribed bodily gestures and meditative movement," said Vajracharya.



UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST

REL Guest Lecture Series

SACRED DANCE OF NEPAL

DECEMBER 2, 2021
6:00PM PST

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Prajwal Bajracharya
Founder, Dance Mandal

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Touching on Charya giti, the songs from which the dances arise, Vajracharya said, "Charya giti tell us about the iconography of deities and yoginis, about what they are holding in their hands and what they are wearing. Every little thing the deities hold in their hands or wear have a lot of religious and esoteric meaning. But the giti also tell us about their compassion and power, their



ability to enlighten and transform, their willingness to come to the aid of struggling practitioners, leading them to liberation.

"In Portland, we dance more than 50 charya dances, many of which we have created. But there are thousands of Charya dances," Vajracharya stated. "My father, Ratna Kaji Vajracharya, collected 556 charya in his charya books, volumes 1 and 2. Likewise, my brother, who is also collecting ancient charya giti, has about 1,500 of them he would like to publish," Guru Prajwal said.

"The musical instruments used with traditional Newar Vajrayana Buddhist charya dance and charya giti are only tinchu, the small hand cymbals, and damaru, the small double-headed drum," the Guru added.



Vajracharya made it clear that charya dance is not just a dance; it is a teaching; it is a preaching, as well as a philosophy yielding deep understandings and guidelines for moving forward in life.

Dwelling on Dharma teaching, he said that “raga,” “dwesa” and “moha” (desire, anger and ignorance) are the most formidable enemies of human beings, as attested to in the dance.

Guru Prajwal's lecture on the sacred dances of Nepal presented comprehensive details on Pancha

Buddha (Vairochana, Amitabha, Ratnasambhava, Amoghasiddhi, Akshovya), Manjushri, Nairatma, and other deities.

In discussing the history of Newar Vajrayana Buddhism in Nepal, Vajracharya also mentioned the visits of Vipashwi Buddha, Shikhi Buddha, Vishwobhu Buddha, Krakuchanda Buddha, Kashyap Buddha and Kanakmuni Buddha to the Nepal Mandala. He also touched on the ancient and medieval Mahasiddhas like Shantikaracharya - the first Bajracharya Guru of the Nepal Mandala and Surat Bajra Bajracharya, Manju Bajra Bajracharya and so on.

Reverend Guru Vajracharya was introduced by Dr Miroj Shakya of the University of the West, a friend and



colleague from Nepal. The University of the West (UWest) is a private Buddhist university in Rosemead, California. It was founded in 1990 by Hsing Yun, founder of the Taiwan-based Buddhist Order Fo Guang Shan and Hsi Lai Temple.



Saturday, 11 December 2021

**Durgatiparishodhana Chanting Performed for Guru
Prajwal Vajracharya's Brothers**

Durgatiparishodhana chanting was performed in Sanskrit and in Nepal Bhasa today at Nritya Mandala Mahavihara in memory of the late Gautam Ratna Vajracharya and the late Mahendra Ratna Vajracharya, both recently deceased elder brothers of our



beloved Guruju. 25 sangha members participated in the vihara and another 25 participated on Zoom from Nepal, Hong Kong and the USA.

Religious tributes were also paid to Guruji's cousins Vishwo Ratna Vajracharya and Kiran Vajracharya. In addition, homage was paid to the late Paras Muni Shakya and the late Rajendra Muni Shakya, brothers of Sangha member Aniruddha Shakya, as well as the late Chiniya Lal Amatya, father of community member Kabindra Amatya and the late Parbati Malla, mother of community member Sharmista Amatya.

On the occasion, Dharani and the Namasangiti were also chanted by the Sangha members and participants on Zoom. 108 butter lamps were burned in honor of the deceased souls.



Saturday, 18 December 2021

Four Week Charya Giti and Dance Course on Manjushri Wraps Up



"The Path of Yogic Singing and Sacred Dancing," organized by Yangchenma Arts and Music began on 27 November and concluded today. Gurujū Prajwal Vajracharya and his student and master singer Joshua Proto co-taught the course, whose purpose was to provide a basic introduction with the yogic song, or charya giti, and the accompanying sacred ritual dance of Maha Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of

Wisdom.

During the four week course, participants learned the full giti to Maha Manjushri, as well as the accompanying sacred ritual dance, in order to cultivate wisdom and awareness in body, voice and mind. The course consisted of both the practical and theoretical aspects of the charya song and dance.

In the first half of each weekly class, virtual participants were instructed in the oral tradition of Nepalese ragas (musical modes) and talas (rhythmic cycles) and were taught the traditional melodic song of Maha Manjushri by Josh. Over the four classes, the participants were familiarized with cultivating their voices, matching the pitches of the raga, and keeping time with the tinchu.

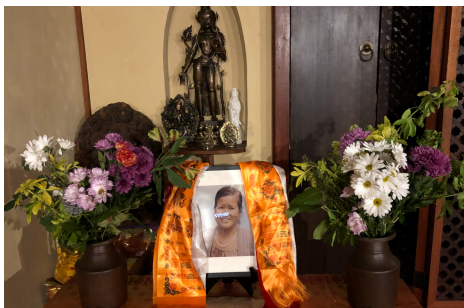


Guru Prajwal indicated that "Maha Manjushri normally holds a sword in one hand to cut through all illusion, and a Prajnaparamita wisdom text in the other." This was exemplified in the second half of the class, when Guru Prajwal taught the complete ritual dance of Maha Manjushri, where the sword was held and wielded with the right hand, and the text held in the left as the dancer went through the motions of the dance. Finally, the song and dance were merged, as participants sang the giti while performing the dance.

Tuesday, 28 December 2021

Memorial Service Held for Surya Laxmi Shakya

Memorial services were held at Nritya Mandala Mahavihara on 23 December for Surya Laxmi Shakya, who died at 72 years of kidney failure in Kathmandu. Surya Laxmi was the mother of



Suva Shakya, a sangha member of Nritya Mandala Mahavihara, the mother-in-law of Uppa Shakya, a board member of Nritya Mandala Mahavihara, and the sister-in-law of Daya Shakya, also a sangha member.

The late Surya Laxmi, who was born in 1949 in Kathmandu, is survived by husband Dharma Ratna Shakya, four sons, a daughter and six grandchildren.

The Pujari for the service was Daya Shakya. In addition to the chanting of the Durgatiparishodhana text, the service included 108 butter

lamps and a slide show of photos depicting the late Shakya in Nepal and on a recent visit to the USA.

Nritya Mandala Mahavihara co-founder, Prajwal Ratna Vajracharya; President of Nepali Association of Oregon, Daya Shakya; son Suva Shakya from Hermiston; and Seattle resident Laxman Shakya all spoke about

their memories of the late Surya Laxmi Shakya during the memorial service.



The memorial service was attended by 20 American and Nepalese sangha members and 20 others from Nepal, Hong Kong and the USA on Zoom.

