

Reported By Dr. Rabin Man Shakya

Tuesday, February 2, 2021

Dharani Literature One of the Most Important Aspects of Newah Vajrayana Buddhism, says Dr Shakya

A regular weekly Dharani recitation was held on Zoom on Tuesday, Feb 2, 2021. Tuesday's Dharani recitation was attended by 12 people from Canada, Hong Kong, California and Oregon. Dharani and other mantras were chanted by Pundit Prajwal Ratna Vajracharya followed by the other participants.



Speaking on the occasion, Dr Miroj Shakya said: "Dharani literature is one of the most important and most interesting aspects of Buddhism in general and Newah Buddhism in particular." Expressing the view that the ancient roots of Dharani are still obscure, Dr Shakya said that their emergence may partly be connected to indigenous mantric lore that found its way first to Atharvaved and then to both early Bramhanic and Buddhist spell literature.

Throwing light on the historical importance of Dharanis, Dr Shakya said that Dharani literature has existed for over two

millennia in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. He discussed origin and evolution of Dharanis in India and Nepal and their widespread use by Nepalese Buddhist practitioners.

Typically used to prevent misfortune, remove obstacles, heal and protect, Dharani are also used in life cycle rituals and other practices, Dr Shakyia added. But, sometimes, Dharani were also used for bad intentions like exorcism and witchcraft, he stated.

Lots of sounds contained in the Dharani are believed to have come from other Lokas such as Deva Loka, Ashura Loka, Naga Loka etc, Dr Shakyia indicated.

According to Dr Shakyia, the days and dieties are interrelated in Dharani reciting:

Vasudhara - Sunday

Vajra Vidarini - Monday

Ganapati - Tuesday

Usnisavijaya - Wednesday

Parnasavari - Thursday

Marici - Friday

Grahamatrika - Saturday

Dr Miroj Shakyia is an associate professor and co-chair of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of the West in Rosemead, California. He is part of the Rare Buddhist Sanskrit Manuscript Preservation Project and Sanskrit Language Working Group, and editor of the "Catalog of Digitized Rare Sanskrit Buddhist Manuscripts." At the end of Dharani

recitation, Dr Shakya answered many questions and comments from participants like Dr Tina Ho (Hong Kong), Anastasia Roderick, Andrea Wollein, Daya Shakya and Dr Rabin Man Shakya.

Saturday, Feb 6, 2021

Zoom Teaching on Singha Mukha Charya Dance

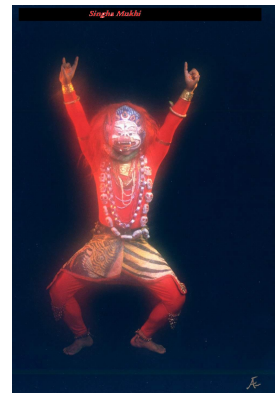


Guru Prajwal Vajracharya's Zoom class for Hong Kong sangha students on the charya dance to Singha Mukha included the subtle meanings of the various mudras, gestures of hands, feet and body as well as the meanings and significance of each finger in the charya dance.

Informing participants that Singha Mukha was a masked dance, Prajwal said that the lion-faced Dakini is a secret form of Vajrayogini. She is danced with great vigor and dramatic movement.

Singha Mukha is a red, fearless and very wrathful deity, emphasizing that enlightenment is not a passionless state, but rather a state of wholeness in which one has access to all the energies and capacities of one's being, Guru Prajwal said.

The raga for this Charya song is Travali and the tala is Trihura, Pundit Vajracharya said speaking on the occasion



Saturday, February 13, 2021

Nritya Mandala Mahavihara Promoting and Preserving Cultural Values of Nepal, says Vajracharya



World Newah Organization USA
brings
a virtual conversation on Heritage
EPISODE #2
Presenter: Prajwal R Vajracharya
TOPIC: Nritya Mandala Mahavihara

DATE: FEB 13, 2021, SATURDAY
TIME: 10:00 PM (ET)/ 7:00 PM (PT)

PROGRAM MODERATOR:
Pramesh Shrestha

www.facebook.com/WorldNewahOrganizationUSA

Promoting, preserving and protecting traditional and cultural values of Nepal in the USA is not easy work, but Nritya Mandala Mahavihara in Portland is giving it a shot. Its establishment in 2009 paved the way for Nepalese Portlanders and beyond to carry on with lots of lifecycle rituals and cultural ceremonies just the way it is done in the Kathmandu valley.

Priest and co-founder of Nritya Mandala Mahavihara Prajwal Ratna Vajracharya said this while addressing 'e-heritage' a virtual conversation hosted by World Newah Organization, USA chapter on Saturday, Feb 13, 2021. The program was attended by a number of people from the USA, UK, Canada, Hong Kong and Nepal.



Discussing the concept of the Viharas, many of which are thousands of thousands years old, Vajracharya said: "A Vihara is a spiritual connection. A Vihara is also a courtyard. Back in the old days, a Vihara used to be a monastery and a school, as well." He informed the participants that there are 500 Viharas in the Kathmandu

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valley. Viharas were built in the historical past to build the community and fraternity in the area. The last Vihara built in Nepal was 350 years ago. Nritya Mandala Mahavihara is the first Vihara consecrated abroad since that time, Vajracharya added.



Make no mistake between Dance Mandala and Nritya Mandala Mahavihara, said Prajwal adding, "Dance Mandal was launched in 1996 in Kathmandu, whereas Nritya Mandala Mahavihara was established in 2009 in Portland, USA."

Prajwal also shed light on the history of the Mahavihara, the challenges and problems he faced in the beginning. "There was a fire during the construction of the Mahavihara and as a result we had to stop the construction for one whole year. A lot of damage was caused by the fire," Prajwal recollected. Helen Appell, an American Vajrayana Buddhist and co-founder of the Mahavihara, in fact was responsible for its building, and worked with him to help establish the Newah Buddhist Baha in Portland, Prajwal went on saying.

The consecration rituals of NMM were carried on by Prajwal himself and Senior Gubhaju Yagyamanpati Bajracharya and Sugat Bajracharya who came to the US in 2009 for the inauguration rituals, Prajwal stated.

Laying emphasis on the importance of preserving Newah Buddhist heritage, Prajwal said that Nritya Mandala Mahavihara was created to promote Newar Vajrayana Buddhist tradition and practices, to preserve promulgate Charya Nritya and its music and crafts - such as the making of masks, costumes and the jewelry used in the dances - as well as to protect and preserve sacred Buddhist Art of Nepal.



Pundit Vajracharya also underlined the need for publicizing the value of Newah Buddhism in the



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West and said that various lifecycle rituals, such as the rice feeding ceremony, wedding ceremony, Bratabandha, Ihi, Bhima Rathahana and other rituals were performed in the Mahavihara.

Many dignitaries and Dharma luminaries have visited the Mahavihara in the past like the Dalai Lama's personal interpreter and the Dalai Lama's previous teacher and many renowned Rinpoches etc, Prajwal said.

Earlier, Pramesh Shrestha of the World Newah Organization, USA chapter gave a short introduction of pundit Vajracharya who is also the director of Heritage Division, WNO, USA chapter.



Tuesday, Feb 16, 2021

Manjushri Day Observed with Namasangiti Chanting



15 people from Hong Kong, Canada, Oregon and California took part in a virtual program in which Namasangiti was recited by Pundit Prajwal Ratna Vajracharya and followed by other participants.

Speaking on the importance of Manjushri Day, Guru Prajwal Ratna Vajracharya said that this day was considered an auspicious day for any kind of life cycle ritual. He also indicated that people in Nepal visit Swayambhu on Manjushri Day (also known as Shree Panchami) to worship Lord Manjushri.

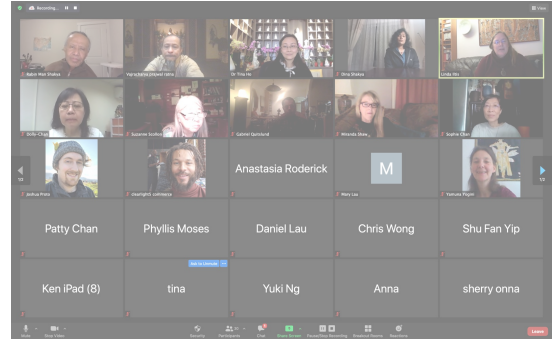
Connecting Manjushri and the chanting of the Namasangiti, Prajwal said, "The gist of Namasangiti is that Manjushri Bodhisattva is the embodiment of all Buddhist knowledge."

It is to be noted that Buddhists offer worship to Lord Manjushri and the Hindus to the Goddess Saraswati on the same day, also known as Basant Panchami.

Saturday, Feb 20, 2021

Zoom teaching on Vajravarahi dance

This teaching on the Charya dance to Vajravarahi was primarily attended by students from the Hong Kong sangha, and was taught both by both Prajwal Ratna Vajracharya and Dr. Miranda Shaw.



Vajravarahi is one of the most important female deities in Newar Vajrayana Buddhism. She is the central deity in the Five Dakini Mandala and is the mother of all Dakinis. She is invoked to destroy enemies and she also protects Newar temples and buildings.



Prajwal indicated that Vajravarahi is a deity of compassion, but when chased by evil creatures, she can hide under the ground, protecting herself with the help of her boar's mouth. She is the deity who can create good out of bad, who can move forward, transforming malice and malevolence into compassion and kindness.

Pundit Vajracharya said: "Vajravarahi is always in the center of Nepal Mandala. A wild boar's head is there on the right side of Vajravarahi's head or on the top of her head. Four to ten of her toddlers are fed from her breast simultaneously." "Varahi" refers to any of the four boar-headed deities who preside over the Kathmandu Valley, he added.



"Manjushree Bodhisattva's Roar Awakens the World"
Saturday, Feb 20, 2021

A talk on "Manjushree Bodhisattva's Roar Awakens the World" was organized on Zoom by the Hong Kong Buddhist Studies Association. The first half of the talk

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was conducted by Dr. Tina Ho of the Hong Kong sangha while the second half was given by Pundit Prajwal Ratna Vajracharya of Nritya Mandala Mahavihara.



About 35 people from USA, Hong Kong, Germany and Canada took part in the virtual program. In Ho's brilliant presentation, she said that Manjushree is one of the most important, iconic figures in Mahayana Buddhism and is also known as the bodhisattva of great wisdom.

The essence of Manjushree's wisdom is captured in esoteric Buddhist texts like Manjushree Mulkalpa and Manjushree Namasangiti, Ho then said, adding: "Manjushree leads devotees to understand the core of the Vimalakirti Sutra's non-dual method."

Through pictures and many exquisite icons, the Zoom participants were able to get an overview of Manjushree's appearance in different cultural contexts.

Prajwal Vajracharya pointed out that Lord Manjushree is the Bodhisattva of wisdom, holding a sword in his right hand to cut off delusion, and a Prajnaparamita text in his left hand. He indicated that Manjushree was one of the most powerful icons who had always strengthened cordial ties between China and Nepal since ancient times.



Saturday Feb 20, 2021

Three Month Weekly Zoom Course on 'Sacred Buddhist Dance of Nepal' Kicks off at Nritya Mandala Mahavihara

Little is known about when the Charya Nritya - which is an ancient dance form that used to be exclusively performed by Vajracharyas within the Buddhist Newah community in Nepal - exactly originated.

But Prajwal Vajracharya, co-founder of Nritya Mandala Mahavihara in Portland, says that this Buddhist ritual dance dates back to more than a thousand years.

Charya dance - which was on the verge of extinction in the 1960s - has again made a comeback. Tremendous strides have recently been made towards its preservation and dissemination of knowledge about the Charya dances and credit for it goes to luminaries like late pundit Asha Kaji Vajracharya, late pundit Ratna Kaji Vajracharya and Guru Prajwal Ratna Vajracharya and so on.

For the past 11 years, Prajwal has served as the Nritya Mandala Mahavihara's co-founder. His students - mainly the American Charya dancers and American Vajrayana Buddhists - describe him as a versatile teacher, compassionate human being, charismatic speaker and a very hard working person.

Today, Charya Nritya's presence and popularity is already strong and effective in Nepal, the USA and other countries. The top priority of Nritya Mandala Mahavihara is to further popularize, enrich and enhance it. Lately, the Charya Nritya seems to have undergone a complete transformation.

"Sacred Buddhist Dance of Nepal" is a three month weekly course with pundit Prajwal Vajracharya. This course is offered live on zoom from Feb 20 to May 8,

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2021 every Saturday. 90 minutes class on zoom every Saturday on Charya dances is, so far, participated by 50 students from 15 countries across the world, says Vajracharya.

This course is a three part training in Charya Nritya dance, a unique Newari Buddhist Nepali tradition dating back over a thousand years, that uses the physical body as a vehicle for liberating the mind, he says. By uniting movement, visualization and awareness, he says, a student learns to emulate and then fully embody the qualities of variety of Buddhist deities - male and women, peaceful and wrathful - and to genuinely express those enlightened qualities through one's own body, speech, mind and activities.

Part one of this course is 'Foundations' which lays the groundwork for all to-be-continued studies in the tradition of sacred Buddhist dance of Nepal, Prajwal adds. "Participants will learn the history of this ancient practice, train our bodies in the movements, exercises, hand and foot mudras, and techniques that are the foundations of Charya dance and practice the Refuge and the 16 offering Goddess dances", Prajwal informed the Nepal Oregon News.

He further went on saying:"In part two of this course, participants will learn the dance of Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of compassion, and practice the art of embodying and expressing his enlightened qualities through our gestures, facial expressions and physical movements, paired with focused awareness."

In part three of this course, he says, students will learn the dance of Tara, the female Buddha of Liberating Activities, and practice how to embody and express her all-pervasive enlightened qualities through body, energy and mind.

Anna Shustrova's Solo Charya Dance Performance Sunday, Feb 21, 2021



On her birthday, Anna Shustrova provided a stirring solo Charya dance performance on Zoom. Attending with masks and social distancing were a limited number of people at Nritya Mandala Mahavihara, as well.

The program began with the Refuge Prayer dance performed by Prajwal Vajracharya, Joshua Proto and Anna Shustrova.

Shustrova then presented three solo dances: (1) White Tara (or Sapta Lochani), (2) Vajravarahi and (3) Singha Mukha, the lion-faced dakini. Her performance was very moving, clearly reflecting the inner qualities and intentions of the deities themselves.

Sangha member and premier singer Proto sang the accompanying charya giti very skillfully, while also playing tinchu (or taa), the small cymbals. When appropriate to the dances, Vajracharya played the damaru.



Addressing the Zoom viewers, Prajwal Vajracharya underlined the importance of Charya dance in Newar Vajrayana Buddhism.

Addressing the zoom participants, Prajwal Vajracharya underlined the importance



of Charya dance in Newar Buddhism. Explaining about White Tara, Vajracharya said that she is the female Bodhisattva of compassion, the supreme mother and collective manifestation of the enlightened activity, of all the Buddhas. Speaking about Vajra Varahi dakini, Prajwal said that she is the mother of all Dakinis. Vajra Varahi is invoked to destroy enemies, he said. Furthermore, Pundit

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Vajracharya said that Singhamukha is a lion-faced Dakini who is a secret form of Vajrayogini.

<https://www.facebook.com/prajwal.vajracharya/videos/10219870496178481>

Feb 28th 2021 Sunday

Teaching on dance prayer and health Host by New York

Portland, Feb 28, 2021: "Motivation is very important factor in Charya dancing. You do not practice Charya as a form of entertainment. You do Charya as a form of spiritual movement, as meditation, as prayer, as sadhana."

Prajwal Vajracharya of the Nritya Mandala Mahavihara said this during a virtual talk on "Immerse yourself in dance, prayer and radiant health" organized in the zoom by Tara Dhatu, New York on Feb 28, 2021.

Charya dance itself is considered as meditation. Charya is a process of immersing yourself in dance, spirituality and prayer, Prajwal added.

Tara Dhatu is a non-profit organization, an international community, and a sacred vehicle for the liberation of all beings. Tara Dhatu is dedicated to the inspiration and uplifting of humanity through the spiritual arts of music, meditation, prayer and service.

