

Newsletter :January 2021

Reported By Dr.Rabin Man Shakya

Nepali Temple in Portland, USA Greets New Year 2021 with Purification Rituals amid Covid-19 Pandemic



Portland, Jan 4, 2021 (Nepal Oregon News): The Nepalese Buddhist temple in Portland - Nritya Mandala Mahavihara - bade farewell to 2020 and greeted the new year 2021 by performing and chanting Gurumandala Puja on Friday, Jan 1, 2021.

Very limited number of people joined the Puja - which was conducted by Mahavihara's co-founder, pundit Prajwal Ratna Vajracharya - for purifying and reviving the old energy of the previous year and for overcoming obstacles and opening up fresh new potential through the annual New Year's purification ritual at the Mahavihara because of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Mandatory social distancing, covering of face and other pandemic guidelines were strictly followed during the New Year purification puja at the Portland Baha.

This kind of New Year purification puja is chanted at the Mahavihara once every year, says Guruju Prajwal adding: "The Puja helps you to move forward with new vigour and enthusiasm all year along."

For this Puja, only 1, 3, 5, 11, 21, or 108 people are able to participate in the ritual, based on tradition, Prajwal went on saying. The participants at the New Year purification puja were: Joshua Proto, Anna Shushtrova, Naveena Shakya, Alexei Dobry, Gabriel Quitslund and Dr Rabin Man Shakya. Except the limited number of participants because of the ongoing



Newsletter :January 2021

coronavirus pandemic, the religious program was taken part by 15 other participants on the zoom from Oregon, California, Hongkong and Nepal.

On the occasion, a Mandala - which is a circle or cosmic diagram for ritual of interior visualization, representing various realms of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and their cosmic energies - was also drawn for each participant. Likewise, three Gojas on the sand Mandala were worshipped during the ritual.

A Puja Sankalpa consisting of raw rice, beaten rice, dry fruit, red and yellow color powder, flowers, a little cow milk, three small incense sticks, six cotton wicks, three Gojas, three Jajankas, three coins etc were carefully and meticulously prepared for each participant who were seen sitting cross-legged six feet apart from each other at the Mahavihara.

The traditional community ceremony honored oneself and others by making offerings of purified elements and was guided by using one's own Mandala of sand.

On the occasion, participants were also given time for a short meditation.

Similarly, a long pasuka (sacred thread) was used, spread and passed over to all the New Year purification ritual participants. It was an important component of the purification ritual.

Meanwhile, before the start of purification ritual, Sangha member Naveena Shakya offered fruits to Tathagata Buddha to commemorate Punya Tithi of the third year of passing away of her mother-in-law Man Shova Shakya.

New Year's purification ritual event was followed by a vegetarian pot-luck dinner and opening of champagnes. Importantly, Yomari dumplings were also served during the New Year feast reminding participants of the Yomari Punhi observed couple of days before the New Year day.



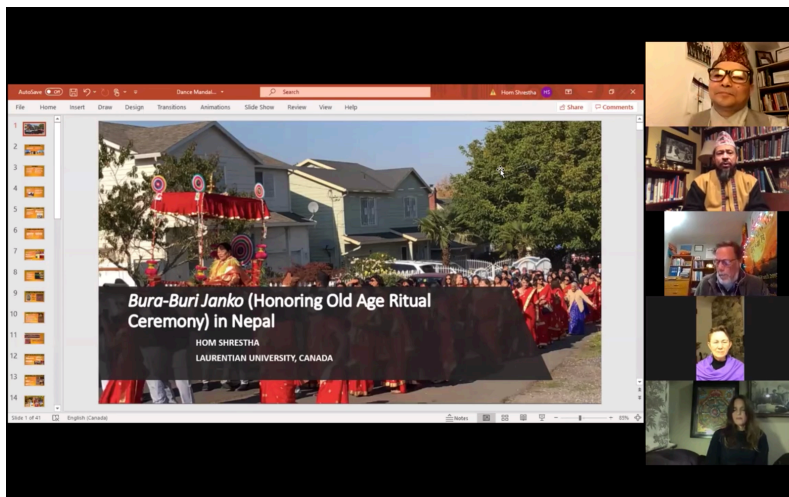
Newsletter :January 2021

Friday, January 8, 2021

Cultural Significance of Bura-Buri Janko Stressed

In a virtual talk on 'Bura-Buri Janko (or Bhimratharohan) - Honoring Old Age Ritual Ceremony in Nepal' by Hom Shrestha, a Ph D candidate in Canada, Shrestha

discussed the importance of these life cycle rituals, including their cultural and traditional significance.



Speaking on the occasion, co-founder of Nritya Mandala Mahavihara Prajwal Vajracharya said: "When a man or woman turns 77years, 7 months, 7 days and 7 hours, there is a special ceremony to perform. The celebration may

also be held for a couple when either the husband or wife reaches that age."

The Bhimratharohan (or Bhima Rathahana) observance calls on the goddess of long life, Usnisavijaya, to purify karma and bestow the blessings of good health and a long life span, Prajwal added.

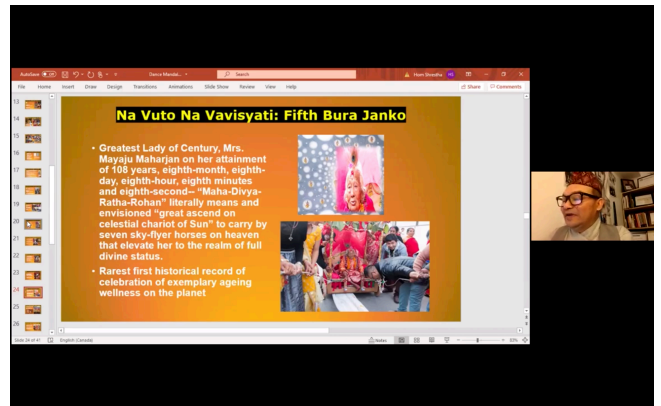
Shrestha indicated that the Bura-Buri Janko is a 5,000 year old ritual tradition with a strong cultural basis in Newah culture. "To get old in Nepal is to become a God", Shrestha said, adding that aging is a spiritual process in Newah tradition and also growing into old age is an eternal truth.

Emphasising the cultural significance of the Bhimratharohan, Shrestha expressed the view that Bura Buri Janko enhances the compassionate transcendental life for elder or senior people, improves their experience of their standing in the community, and forms a holistic approach to spiritual, emotional and intellectual wellness.

According to Shrestha, the important aspects of the Bura Janko include: the welcome ceremony (Lasakusa); the fire ceremony (Homa Puja or yojna); the

Newsletter :January 2021

Kalash Puja, the Argha Puja (offering holy water) for the washing of the celebrant's feet; the offering of blessings with milk, roasted rice and coins, and the receiving of blessings by those who bow down to touch the feet of the celebrant; the donning of a new pair of gold earrings; riding an elaborately-decorated palanquin or chariot of wellness (four-wheel cart) through the neighborhood; the Bettali chikegu, in which the celebrant's head is wrapped in white cloth; the sacred dish (Thayebhu), a large plate on which the celebrant is offered put to 84 different dishes for their health and nutrition; and concluding with the Khen Sagan Kayegu, the fish, egg and wine feast always used at new beginnings.



The virtual interaction on Bura Buri Janko was attended by 15 participants from the USA, Hongkong and Canada. Prof. Dr. Linda Iltis of University of Washington was among the participants. The talk was followed by an interaction between Shresta and the participants.

Living and studying in Canada since 2014, Hom Shresta is an emerging indigenous scholar (Masters in Interdisciplinary Health Program, Honors B. A. in Specialized Gerontology) who belongs to the indigenous clan of the sacred land of Nepal Mandala. Shresta also volunteers at Laurentian University and has participated in the CIHR - funded dementia research activities in Ontario.

Saturday January 9th

Vajracharya Stresses Need for Preservation of Nepal's Ancient Heritage

Ancient temples and stupas in the Kathmandu valley are important parts of Nepal's national heritage. It is so painful to say that many of the temples and stupas are in the dilapidated condition, many have been stolen away.



Nritya Mandala Mahavihara's (NMM) co-founder Prajwal Ratna Vajracharya said this during a virtual presentation 'e-heritage' organized by World Newah Organization (WNO), USA chapter on Saturday, Jan 9, 2021

Vajracharya during the live virtual presentation said that Nepalese traditions like Rice Feeding Ceremony, Ihi, Bara Tayegu, Chuda Karma, Bratabandha Wedding and Bhimratharohan are important life cycle events which have so much meaning.

Dwelling on the rich historical heritage of Nepal, he said it is the spirituality that helped to create so many unique and intricate masterpieces of arts and culture in the past. In his talk, Prajwal confirmed Nritya Mandala Mahavihara's readiness, as always, to get involved as much as possible in matters concerning the preservation of Charya dance, life cycle rituals and festivals and traditions of the Newah people.



Newsletter :January 2021



In fact, the NMM's contribution for protecting and promoting Nepalese Buddhist heritage and rituals in the USA is known to everyone in the Nepalese community in the USA and beyond.

He emphasized that Swayambhu stupa is considered to be the oldest historical monument in the Kathmandu valley. "

But I do not know how old. All the evidences have been burnt or thrown away in the rivers. Swayambhu Nath existed before civilization started in the Kathmandu valley," he said.

The virtual interaction between Vajracharya and other zoom participants was interesting and useful because he also displayed pictures of many temples, stupas, Vahas, ritual objects and so on. He also explained their religious and cultural significance.



Noting that cultural and traditional values have always been sacred to the Newah people, Prajwal threw light on the preponderance of historical monuments, stupas and temples in the Kathmandu valley. He said : "Every five minutes walk, you find the Viharas, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are living there."



Prajwal also shed light on various parts of the stupas and temples. Speaking of Toran, which is a big decorative and metallic piece on the entrance of the Vihara, he said:" There are lots of areas for study and research in Toranas alone. Usually, five Buddhas are carved in a Toran.

Speaking about ancient masonry, metal and wood carving, and, other arts and architecture in medieval Nepal, he said these are the things

Newsletter :January 2021

which provide tourists with unprecedented opportunities for sight-seeing and delving into the past history

A number of scholars from around the world come to Nepal to learn something. So many books have been published about the arts, heritage and culture of Nepal. So many scholars are doing Ph Ds and other research works about the Nepalese arts, culture and rituals, Prajwal said.

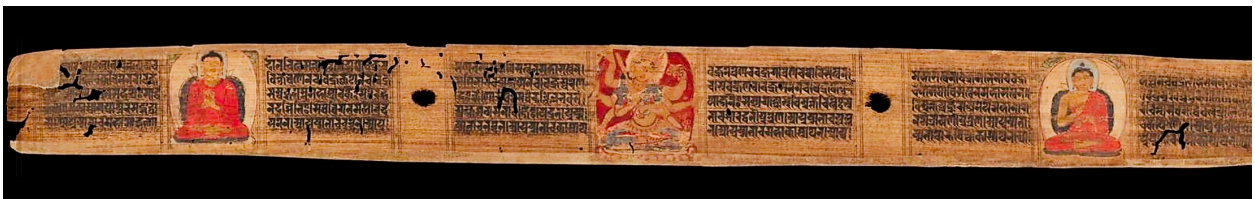
Prajwal also recollected important contributions made by late pundit Asha Kaji Vajracharya and his father late pundit Ratna Kaji Vajracharya in promoting the value of Newah Buddhist culture and rituals.

Prior to the virtual talk, Pramesh Shrestha of the World Newah Organization (WNO), USA chapter gave a short introduction of pundit Vajracharya who is also the director of Heritage Division, WNO, USA chapter.

Tuesday, January 26, 2021

Dharani Recitation Contributing to Protection of Heritage

Many Portlanders and people across America and abroad have been practicing Dharani recitation through Nritya Mandala Mahavihara for over a year on a weekly basis. Beginning in 2019, Dharani recitation was conducted in person at the Mahavihara, but soon after the coronavirus pandemic began, the Dharani recitation began to be conducted on Zoom. There is no doubt that NMM's Dharani recitation - which is the only chanting program of this kind in the West - has proved to be a



significant leap forward in contributing to the protection of this important part of Buddhist heritage. Dharani recitation has always been led by Pundit Prajwal Ratna Vajracharya of the Mahavihara followed by other participants.

Newsletter :January 2021

A regular Dharani recitation was held on Tuesday, Jan 26, 2021 by the Mahavihara on Zoom. In the beginning, Guru Bandana was chanted by Guruju Prajwal. After that, Graha Dasha Ya Paath, Saptavidhan Puja - The Seven Limb Prayer (from the



Bhadracharya desana), Dharani (Buddha, Bodhisatvas's Mantra and Dharanipada) recitation and Prajnaparamita Hridayam Sutra were chanted by Sangha member Naveena Shakya followed by other participants. Zoom participants included Dr Tina Ho (Hong Kong), Hom Shrestha (Canada), Dina Shakya (California), Matt Bourgeois, Gabriel Quitslund, Uppa Shakya (Oregon).

Earlier, speaking about Dharma awareness among the youth, Pundit Prajwal Vajracharya stressed the need for parents' encouragement and involvement in inculcating the value of Dharma on youths' minds. Throwing light on the role of Dharma in the everyday life of human beings, Pundit Vajracharya also added that it can help in many ways to reduce the impact of stress and pressure of life.

Jan 23 Saturday 2021

Teaching on Vasundhara Host by Hong Kong sangha



Newsletter :January 2021

1. The cultural aspects of Nepal's Vasudhāra.
2. The mandala of Vasudhāra
3. The meaning of the mudras of the Vajra Dance of Vasudhāra.
4. Appreciation of the precious "Vasudhāra" paubha painting

Among the many Bodhisattvas in Buddhism, the wisdom of Manjusri, the compassion of Guanyin, the great aspirations of Ksitigarbha, and the great deeds of Samantabhadra demonstrate the abundance of life. Buddhism advocates cultivating wisdom as well as blessing. A female bodhisattva who symbolizes wealth (including material and spiritual) and the spouse of Jambhala (the God of Wealth). The Chinese society calls her the "Wealth of Mother Buddha" and the Bodhisattva of the World. The chant is "Stream of Gems" Dharani. She is called Vasudhāra in Nepal today. Her portrait has three faces and six arms, holding different dharma objects in her hands and possessing different abilities. Vasudhāra is like the mother who bred the earth and cultivated our hearts. She is also a bodhisattva with great compassion.

Wednesday, January 27, 2021

Sadhana Practice Brings Positive Changes in Life

At a time when the whole world is bogged down in the coronavirus crisis and so many countries are facing tumultuous political and economic dilemmas, more and more people in the world are looking to meditation, yoga and Sadhana. Sadhana is a Sanskrit word that

Sadhana is a spiritual practitioner invokes a absorbing it into himself meditation in Vajrayana

Sadhana practice brings has lots of benefits for health. It is also detachment from Sadhana practice is one has been conducted



means spiritual exercise. practice in which the divinity, identifying and - the primary form of Buddhism.

positive changes in life and it mental as well as physical performed for attaining worldly things.

of the many activities which continuously by Portland's

Newsletter :January 2021

Nritya Mandala Mahavihara for many years and has been offered on Zoom during much of the last year.

A regular Dharma talk and Sadhana practice was held on Zoom on Wednesday, Jan 27, with twelve people from Oregon, California, Hongkong and Canada participating. For his Dharma talk Pundit Prajwal Ratna Vajracharya threw light on the importance of both Sadhana and of the chakras in Sadhana.

If you practice Sadhana, you can relieve your stress, sorrow and other worldly problems, said Vajracharya. Buddha provided 16 Sadhanas to help mankind with all manner of suffering, both mental and physical. Sadhana's relevance was also mentioned in Lalitavistara, Vajracharya added.

In turning to chakras, he pointed out that “chakra” means “wheel” or “disk” in Sanskrit, which indicates the shape of human energy points that unite mind, body and spirit.

According to Pundit Vajracharya, there are five kinds of Chakra: (1) Mahasukha chakra (2) Vishuddha chakra (3) Anahata chakra (4) Svadhisthana chakra and (5) Muladhar chakra.

The Mahasukha chakra (Crown chakra), according to Vajracharya, helps us to balance bliss (anand) and happiness. The Vishuddha chakra's (Throat chakra) function is to help us find authentic self-expression. The Anahata chakra (Heart chakra), he pointed out, functions to help us tap into unconditional love.

Regarding the Svadhisthana chakra (Sacral chakra), Vajracharya stated that this chakra helps us regulate our emotions, feelings and hankerings for worldly things, so as not to be guided or misguided by them. And the Muladhar chakra (Root chakra), is the foundation of our body, helping us to maintain a sense of groundless and inner stability.

In closing, Pundit Vajracharya also underlined the importance of praying to Avalokiteshvara and Padmanatesvara in Sadhana practices.

Thursday, January 28, 2021

Naamsangiti - One of the Most Important Preachings of Lord Buddha, says Vajracharya

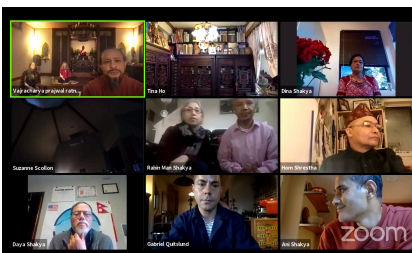
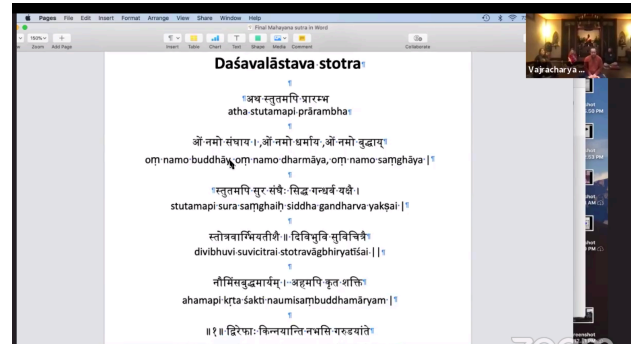
"In Vajrayana Buddhism, Manjusri Namasangiti is one of the most important preachings of Shakyamuni Tathagata. It consists of 160 verses and mantra sentences," Pundit Prajwal Ratna Vajracharya said at a Namasangiti Recitation ritual on Zoom Thursday, Jan 28, 2021, to mark the Full Moon Day.

15 people from Canada, Hong Kong, Nepal, California and Oregon took part at the Namasangiti Recitation.

Nritya Mandala Mahavihara has been organizing Manjusri Namasangiti Recitation on every full moon day of the month since July of the last

year. Also, Namasangiti is recited daily at the Mahavihara during the month of Gunla (Nepal Sambat Lunar Calendar). At a time when a lot of heritage, historical and religious scriptures are on the verge of extinction, disseminating the sacred tantras and preachings is essential to keep them alive, indicated Vajracharya adding, "That's why NMM is dedicated to protecting, promoting and preserving these sacred things."

When we talk about Namasangiti, we need to offer our prayers not only to Tathagata Buddha, but also to Maha Manjusri Bodhisattva and Vajrapani Bodhisattva, Vajracharya felt. He added: "Namasangiti is the quintessence of Buddhism because it summarizes all the Buddha's teachings. In fact, Manjusri Bodhisattva is the embodiment of all such knowledge." Namasangiti was taught by Tathagata Buddha to his disciple, Vajrapani Bodhisattva, and his followers to lead them to enlightenment, Vajracharya stated.



"Reciting of Namasangiti is useful for mitigating stress and tension and gaining health," he said. To further make his point on the importance of Namasangiti in this regard, Vajracharya offered a

Newsletter :January 2021

traditional story: "There is a Khun Bahal (a Vihara of thieves) at Watu Tole in Kathmandu. The Bahal was controlled by spirits, ghosts and spooks. In ancient times, any thief or criminal was sent to Khun Bahal for the punishment. they were always found dead the next morning inside the Bahal. Khun Bahal was just like a notorious haunted house. Then one day, a particular thief was sent to that Bahal. Surprisingly, he was found alive and kicking the next day! The thief revealed that he was chanting Namasangiti all night."