

By Dr. Rabina Man Shakya, Edited BY Kuon Hunt

Saturday, July 3, 2021

Padmanateshvara: One of the 108 Manifestations of Avalokiteshvara



Dr Eliza Lau of the Hong Kong Dance Mandala sangha presented a talk on "The Blessing of Padmanateshvara", an e-heritage virtual conversation organized by the World Newar Organization, USA chapter.

Padmanateshvara (Nasa Dyo), the Newar Lord of the Dance, dancing on top of the "padma," or lotus flower, the deity which represents performance art, the yidam of charya nritya, is considered to be the 92nd manifestation of the 108 Avalokiteshvaras, according to Dr. Lau. She presented a detailed description of the role of the research of Hidenobu Takaoka, a Buddhist monk from Japan, in researching and delineating of the 108 Avalokiteshvaras of Nepal.

Indicating that "Takaoka went to Nepal in the 1970s and did research under the guidance of Amoghvajra Vajracharya. He was interested in the heritage of the 108 Lokeshvaras in Nepal." With a wish to introduce this precious Tantric heritage back into Japan, Takaoka worked with various artists in Nepal to produce a collection of woodcut prints of the 108 Lokeshvaras. Each piece of paper in the collection was handmade from materials collected in the Himalayas, Dr Lau said.

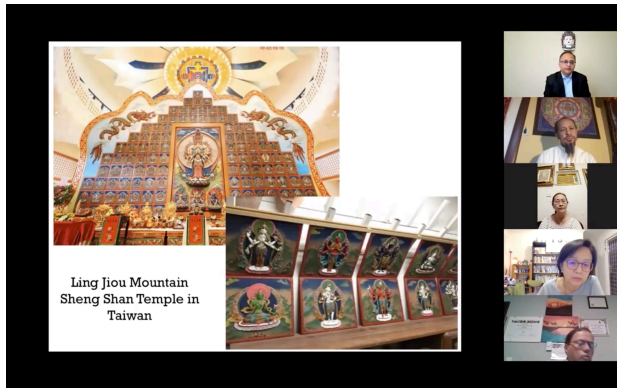
"Padmanateshvara's initial gesture is to indicate the wisdom of the heart, with the second one he touches heaven, with the third the earth. All the other symbols he holds in his hands refer to the Buddha dharma, and about one making decisions to follow this path. The blue lotus refers to the gentle, infinite wisdom of the sky, while using your muscles for action. For on your journey, the possibilities of gaining wisdom are infinite," she said.

Lau further clarified that "The initiation into Padmanateshvara is to incarnate this wisdom by dancing, and by dancing, share it with all. Padmanateshvara is the



source of artistic inspiration, joy, compassion and equanimity. He opens up the path for the practitioner to attainment and success, leading to wisdom."

Dr Tina Ho, also a member of the Hong Kong sangha, discussed the role of Padmanateshvara as a trailblazer for charya dancers. Ho also reminisced on her two visits to Kathmandu, saying, "While Hong Kong is full of skyscrapers and supermarkets, Kathmandu is filled with chaityas, temples and viharas."

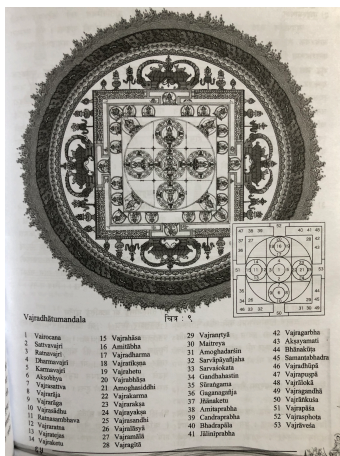


Speaking about the important role of Takaoka in the research of 108 manifestations of Lokeshvara, Guru Prajwal Vajracharya mused, "I used to know Takaoka when I was still a 5 year old kid in Nepal." Guru Vajracharya added that before the pandemic he met Takaoka at the Nagoya temple every year during his visit to Japan.

Other participants like Daya Shakya and Yamuna Yogini also expressed their views about Padmanateshvara at the Zoom event which was coordinated by Prajwal Vajracharya and Pramesh Shrestha of the World Newah Organization - USA chapter.

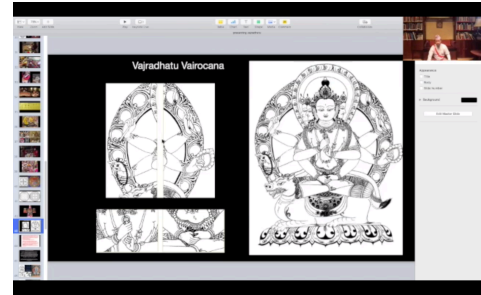
Tuesday, July 6, 2021

Talk on Vajradhatu Practice in Newar Vajrayana Buddhism



Guru Prajwal Vajracharya made a scholarly presentation on the "Vajradhatu Practice in Newar Vajrayana Buddhism" for a virtual event hosted by Yangchenma Arts and organized by Core of Culture today. Participants from all over the world tuned in to the presentation as viewers, and key academic figures engaged with comments and questions. Vajracharya's presentation was part of the "Mudra & the Diamond Sphere: Part Two" lecture series, whose other speakers on other dates include Dr Thinles Dorje and Dr Vena Ramphal.

This entire series on “Mudra and the Diamond Sphere” is an outgrowth of Core of Culture's international cultural preservation initiative focused on the thousand year old Tabo Monastery in Himachal Pradesh in Northern India, where an entire, life-sized Vajradhatu Mandala exists, composed of large clay figures carefully carved into the 53 deities of the Vajradhatu Mandala and properly positioned as such. Lead support for this project comes from the Robert H N Ho Family Foundation, with



additional support from the Kipper Family Foundation.



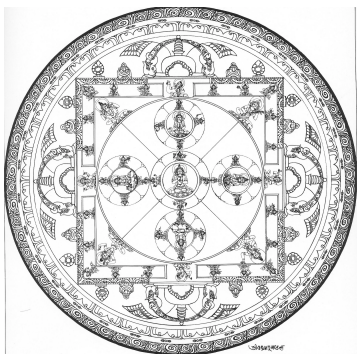
Joseph Houseal, the Director of Core of Culture, introduced the session today, indicating that Core of Culture is in the process of documenting the Vajradhatu ritual that was re-established by the Dalai Lama at Tabo in 2005, calling it a “tantric ritual transmission.” Houseal called Vajradhatu the “transcendental title of Buddha,” representing “the moment of his enlightenment, a golden diamond sphere.” Houseal pointed out that, in fact, Newar’s Tantric ritual practice of Vajradhatu predated that of Tibet by hundreds of years, and was, therefore calling on Vajracharya to open the discussion, as he is a 35th generation Tantric Buddhist priest from Nepal.





Expanding on his earlier talk on “Mudra in Newar Vajrayana Buddhism” in Part 1 of this series, Vajracharya examined the dimensions and realities of Vajradhatu rituals in Nepal as it is lived and practiced in Newar Buddhist traditions.

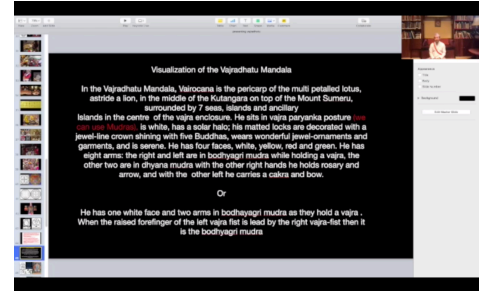
He began with the vajra itself, which represents the “thunderbolt or diamond sphere or essence, and is used as a ritual object to symbolize the indestructible diamond power and irresistible force of the thunderbolt.” In describing the vajra, he said that a common vajra has only 4 dhars (stripes) while an intricate vajra has 8 stripes, and when two vajras are crossed - and thereby united - they become together a vishvo vajra (global Vajra).



Speaking about dhatu, he said that “dhatu” is a Sanskrit term meaning “root.” It relates to the fundamental reason for existence and connects directly to the seven fundamental elements of the body: rasa dhatu, rakta dhatu, mamsa dhatu, medha dhatu, asthi dhatu, majja dhatu and shukra dhatu.

When vajra and dhatu are united together, it becomes Vajradhatu, “a metaphysical space inhabited by 53 deities, centered by Vairochana, including Pancha Buddhas -- Vairochana, Amitabha, Amoghasiddhi, Akshovya, Ratnasambhava, 16 mahabodhisattvas, 16 bhadralpa bodhisattvas, 8 offering goddesses and 8 dvarapalas.” According to Newar Vajrayana Buddhism, the whole universe is moving about and revolving around the Vajradhatu's fundamental principles, Guru Vajracharya indicated.

He said that “Vajradhatu rituals and practice date back well over a thousand years in Newar Vajrayana Buddhism. There are more than 4,000 Vajradhatu Chaityas in Nepal alone.” He also pointed out that Gautama Buddha was born in Nepal and that all the previous buddhas are said to have visited the sacred Nepal Mandala. Similarly, Vajradhatu as well as Dharmadhatu originated in Nepal. Despite all this, Nepal’s historical record in this regard is woefully missing, he pointed out, as non-Buddhist kings since the 12th century have allowed (or supported) such important records and evidence regarding Nepal’s Buddhist heritage to be destroyed or lost.



July 10 Saturday Macha Janko -- an Important Part of Lifecycle Rituals:

Macha Janko, or Annapasana in Sanskrit, are words used for a toddler’s rice feeding ceremony. This ceremony is one of the important lifecycle rituals of Nepal, both a cultural and religious celebration, according to Priest Prajwal Vajracharya. The ceremony is typically held for girls at five months and boys at six months, because it is at about this time the child’s digestive system can easily process solid food.

Guru Prajwal was recently in San Diego, California, to perform the Macha Janko rituals of Alex, young son of Bhima and David, grandson of Nritya Mandala Mahavihara’s Daya Shakya. About 30 people joined in the joyful event.

The day's rituals began with the Gurumandala Puja, as is customary with all major rituals. was performed by Guru Vajracharya. The extended ceremony included many mantras, offerings and the use of numerous ritual objects and materials. All were used to implore and honor the dieties and ancestors, as well as to bless and protect the child.

The ritual outfit worn by the baby was made of red silk embroidered with golden threads. The baby was also adorned with gifts of gold and silver ornaments, like Kalli (anklets).

One of the highlights of the day was the presentation of a large tray, or kisti, to young Alex. It is thought that the first thing the child takes from the tray is an indicator of his later vocation in life. On this tray were a variety of items, a few of which were a pen, a book, a cell phone, toys, candy and a stethoscope. Alex chose the stethoscope, to everyone's gratification.



As the ritual resumed, Prajwal spoke directly to Alex of how he was growing and would now need to care more for himself and eat his own food. At this point a tray of 64 delicious dishes was brought forward and his mother touched his lips with each, signifying his ability now to eat whatever was available to him. Once the ritual feeding was complete, the oldest person present in Alex's family began the process of actually feeding him rice pudding. Each person in the family then, in age order, fed him a teaspoon of pudding, to the extent that he could continue to eat it.

Full and happy and drowsy, Alex then, perhaps, listened to the concluding prayers to the protector and grantor of auspicious new beginnings, the elephant-headed god, Ganesh, requesting that he remove any obstacles in the path of this new member of the extended Shakya family.

Friday, July 30, 2021

Nepalese Wedding Ceremony Solemnized

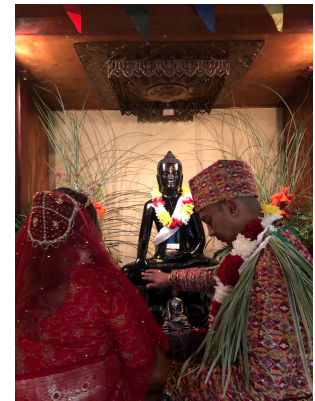


The marriage Umesh Lal Joshi and Karina Marhatta was solemnized this Friday at Nritya Mandala Mahavihara. Both Umesh and Karina are from Nepal, but they are from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Even so, they have made the decision to hold each other's hand and share their future together as a husband and wife. In order to support their decision and their lives together, Sharada Joshi, mother of Umesh, came to Portland from Nepal for her son's wedding

ceremony, and Trishna Marhatta, the bride's mom, came from the East Coast of the US for her daughter.

There were about 35 guests at the wedding ceremony at the Mahavihara from Nepal, Oregon, California, Canada and US East Coast.

First of all, the wedding ceremony began with the ubiquitous Gurumandala Puja, in which Gurujw Prajwal Vajracharya not only offered ritual materials and objects, he purified them, as well as his own body, mind and speech.



Wearing a red sari embroidered with gold thread and dotted with sequins, bride Karina and appropriately attired groom Umesh sat across from priest Vajracharya, as he then guided them, as well, through the ancient words and movements of the Gurumandala Puja, in symbolic purification of their bodies, minds and speech. All major lifecycle rituals begin in this way, in order to purify all intentions and objects involved in such a major undertaking, as well as to acknowledge the potential obstacles that come into any life.



Nepalese wedding rituals include many unique features, including the use of a five-story, stupa-like colored powder holder, from which they were each given tikas. There was also a brief mirror reflection ritual, in which the priest reflected the good energy created during the ritual back to Karina and Umesh, all attendees and all sentient beings.

Karina and Umesh then presented each other with kisli, small bowls containing rice, coins and betel nuts, while prayed for good health and long life together. Gurujy then blessed them and their marriage wishes with a red tika on their foreheads.


Next, Swayambar was the most important component of the wedding ritual in which the bride circled the groom and placed a flower garland over his head and vice versa. Guru Vajracharya indicated that the circling binds their energies together, which was further solidified with the exchange of wedding rings.

Soon after, it was time for Kanyadan, “My daughter is your daughter,” the transfer of responsibility for the bride from her natal family to that of the groom. This was followed by the Saha Bholana, where a large wedding plate filled with delicious food was brought out to the couple, who fed one another from it. Then a ritual blessing of rice, fruit and flowers was poured over their joined heads, and they were given yogurt tikas on their temples as a simple blessing for happiness and joy in their new lives together.

Ultimately, there was a Gwaya Sayeke ritual (sharing betel nuts) in which the groom's family welcomed the bride and introduced their family to promote a life-long relationship. Finally, Khen Sagan Kayegu for all, the traditional closing feast of fish, egg and wine, to honor the beginning of any major venture. It was a lovely, Nepali wedding of traditional elegance.

Saturday, July 31, 2021

Online Classes on Vajrayogini Nritya Wrap Up



Sacred Buddhist Dance of Nepal: Vajrayogini
Eight week course with Prajwal Vajracharya

Greetings!
 The video of Saturday's class is now uploaded in your course. For those of you who would benefit from the mirror view of Prajwal's movements, we have also created an additional video in which you can see all sections of the dance mirrored to make it easier for you to follow. You may select which video you prefer to practice with at home in between sessions.
 Please note, we will not be sending out e-mails every week to let you know when the videos are up. Please get in the habit of checking inside your course for all content.
 For those of you who are new to our platform, you can find the videos of the recordings inside your course in the "LIVE CLASSES" section, under the date of each class (see image below). Please make sure you are logged in to the platform. (Sign in on the top right corner of your screen at learn.yangchema.org and click on "My Dashboard" to access your course(s). Here is an instructional file: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LjBwCTDw4kNCUEmNkx1hT4k97dZPZ7d/view?usp=sharing>
 See you next Saturday!
 Yangchema Arts & Music

An eight week online course attended by 35 participants from 15 different countries on "Sacred Buddhist Dance of Nepal: Vajra Yogini" organized by Yangchema Arts and Music and conducted by Guru Prajwal Vajracharya ended today. In concluding the course, the participants were given Dikchhya, an act of empowerment, by Guru Prajwal.



In this and previous “Sacred Buddhist Dance” courses, Guru Prajwal taught the foundational movements, and exercises to train the body and wake up the subtle channels, as well as the complete dances for the Refuge Prayer, 16 Offering Goddesses, Avalokiteshvara and the groundwork for all future deity dances.

In the class on July 17, Dr. Miranda Shaw, respected author of books on the goddesses of both India and Nepal, was the guest lecturer, speaking eloquently on various aspects of Vajra Yogini's form and mandala.

In delivering his concluding remarks, Guru Prajwal said, “Vajra Yogini is the quintessence of a selfless dakini who always works for the happiness and prosperity of all sentient beings.”



Weekly Practice in Vihara

Dharani Chanting Every Tuesday

NMM's Dharani recitation is the only chanting program of this kind in the West, and helps to preserve this special heritage. The session begins with a Refuge Prayer, the Guru Bandana. This is followed by a protective Dharani, the Graha Dasha ya Paath, and then the Saptavidhana - or Seven Limb - Prayer. These are followed by mantras to the Buddha and bodhisattvas and then recitation of a variety of appropriate Dharani. The Prajnaparamita Hridayam Sutra concludes the chanting and is followed by a brief dharma talk. Please join us.

Sadhana Practice Every Wednesday

Sadhana is a Sanskrit word that means spiritual exercise. Sadhana practice can bring positive changes into one's life and has many benefits for mental as well as physical health. It can also be performed in order to attain detachment from worldly things. Sadhana is a spiritual practice in which the

practitioner invokes divinity, identifying and absorbing it into himself. It is the primary form of meditation in Vajrayana Buddhism. This Sadhana practice time also includes a dharma talk.

At a time when the whole world is bogged down in coronavirus crisis, political turmoil and economic dilemma, it is valuable to embrace meditation, yoga and Sadhana.

Singing Practice Every Friday

The practice of singing Charya Giti is a sadhana of its own. It is deity yoga practice in simple Sanskrit, for which Prajwal will provide the lyrics. These songs focus on the gods, goddesses and philosophy of Vajrayana Buddhism. Anyone interested in learning about this singing tradition, as well as learning to sing these songs, is welcomed to join in.

