

## 3 days Newar Buddhist Conference at UC Berkeley

By Dr. Rabin Man Shakya

By Teya Desesa -Vajracharya and Rabin Man Shakya



Portland, Prajwal Ratna Vajracharya, attended a Newar Buddhist conference in Berkeley, California on March 8-10, 2024.

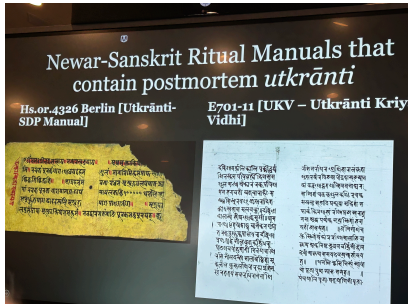
The conference on Newar Vajrayana Buddhism was organized by Numata Center for Buddhist Studies at University of California, Berkeley, and co-sponsored by Glorison Global Network, Institute for South Asian Studies, and Himalayan Studies at Berkeley, California.

The opening ceremony kicked off on Friday, March 8 with wine, beer and refreshments. It gave an opportunity for presenters and distinguished guests to have an informal interaction with each other. This was a very special occasion, and the first of its kind at UC Berkeley.



Day one of the conference on Newar Vajrayana Buddhism consisted of four lecturers speaking on the subject of 'Monastic Buddhism and Its Purported Domestication'. Todd Lewis of Holy Cross College, who is soon to become a professor at

Harvard University, gave his presentation on 'Textual Archives, Arts and Ritual: Early Newar Buddhism'.



Similarly, Samuel M Grimes, Shinjo Ito, post-doctoral fellow, UC Berkeley gave the presentation: "Was There Ever a Local Celibate Samgha in Nepal after the Lichhavi Period? A Survey of the Evidence."

Likewise, Alexander von Rospatt, UC Berkeley presented a thought-provoking paper on "The Treatment of the Monastic Ordination as a Rite of Passage in the Parajika Literature and Its Precursors".

Furthermore, Christoph Emmrich, University of Toronto dwelt on "Malla Period Girlhood Rites. Textualization of the Ihi and Bahra in Late Medieval to Early Modern Newar Manuals".

The second day of the Newar Buddhist conference was devoted to the topic of "Vajrayana Practices in Nepal." The following were the speakers and their presentations:

Peter-Daniel Szanto, Eotvos Lorand University, "A Tibetan in Nepal during the End of the World"

Ryan Damron, 84000: Translating the words of the Buddha

"The Making of a Vajracharya: The Influence of Newar Buddhism on the Career of the Indian



Pandita Vanaratna"

Tsunehiko Sugiki, Hiroshima University, "The Psychophysiology of the Samara Literature"

Kris Anderson, 84000 Translating the Words of the Buddha

"Traces and Variations: Development of the Utkranti Funeral in Newar Buddhism"



Manik Bajracharya, Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities

"Royal Patronage of the Cult of Bungama-Lokeshvara under King Srinivasa Malla"

Camillo Formigatti, Independent Scholar

"Remaking Buddhism for Early Modern Nepal. Jayamuni and His Role in 17th Century Newar Buddhism"

Megan Howard Masang, Yale University

"The Textual History of the Lake-Draining Episode in the Svayambhupurana"

Miroj Shakya, University of the West

"A Liberator of Hell Beings: Nepalese Legends of Jatadhari Lokeshvara"

Petra Lamberson, UC Berkeley

## "Vishnu Bows and Shiva Cries: Buddhist Mahatmya Literature of the Nepal Valley"

The third and final day of the Newar Buddhist conference was dedicated to the Arts. The following were the speakers and their topics of discussions:

Makato Kitada, Osaka University

"Caca Songs. So Called New Caryapada in Kathmandu"

Suyog Prajapati, University of Michigan

"Always Watching: Sacred Gaze Through the Newar Jhya and Its Indo-Islamic Contexts"



The conference on Newar Vajrayana Buddhism wrapped up with a group workshop entitled "Tools for the Study of Nepalese Buddhism."

Prajwal Guruji was very grateful to have been a guest at this exciting and amazing gathering of brilliant minds and was deeply inspired by each presenter. The Guruji was happy to make connections with distinguished speakers and attendees with such passionate interest in Newar Vajrayana Buddhism.

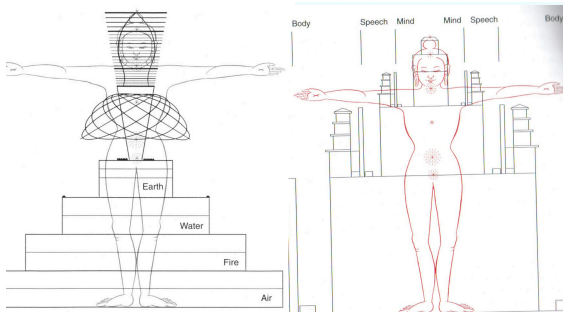
## Zoom Teaching on 'Kaya, Vak, Chitta' Organized for Dance Mandal Japan

By Teya Desesa - Vajracharya and Rabin Man Shakya

Portland, A virtual teaching on 'Kaya, Vak, Chitta' was organized on Friday, March 15, 2024 for students of Dance Mandal Japan.

The remotely held teaching which was conducted by Prajwal Ratna Vajracharya, a priest from one of the Vajrayana Buddhist lineages of

Nepal, provided an opportunity to the activists of Dance Mandal Japan to learn about the relevance and importance of Kaya, Vak and Chitta in the real life.

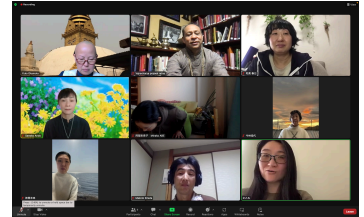


Prajwal Guruji inspired the students of the Dance Mandal Japan with his teaching on how to embody the Kaya, Vak, Chitta, and how to awaken and connect through learning the Kaya Mudra, Vak Mudra and Chitta Mudra.

Kaya is the body, Vak is the speech and Chitta is the mind, the Guruji told the Japanese participants. Prajwal Guruji emphasized that any Mudra that is made, cannot be separated from Kaya, Vak Chitta. Our every gesture is connected with body, speech and mind, the Guruji said.

Prajwal kicked off the teaching with offering praise to Padmanateshvara, the Lord of Dance. The noted Charya dance teacher related the iconography of Padmanateshvara with Kaya, Vak, Chitta, as the dancing Bodhisattva has ten arms, and is holding the tools to help all sentient beings, dancing on top of a lotus flower.

Kaya is the form, how you see yourself with ten arms. Vak is the speaking of the meaning of holding the tools and being adorned with beautiful garments and ornaments, representing what he gives to the world -- unconditional compassion and kindness. The mind is the combination of body and speech, from which the Bodhisattva gives meaning and purpose of life through his being, Prajwal concluded.



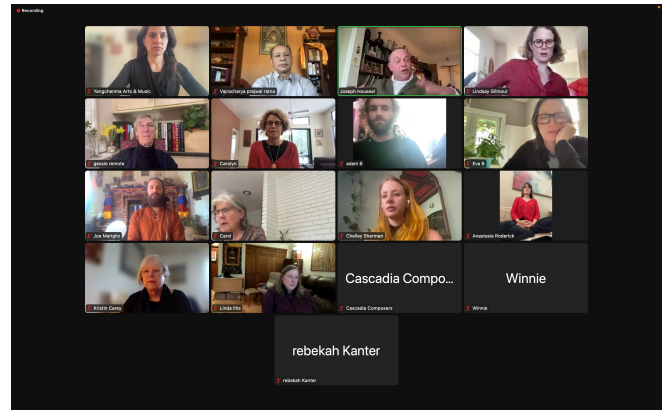
## **Virtual Presentations on Sacred Documentation in the Himalayas**

Portland, An international virtual presentation on Sacred Documentation in the Himalayas, which was hosted by Yangchenma Arts & Music, was organized in March, 2024 by Core of Culture. The four-week event was a journey through the history and culture of Himalayan dance traditions.

The program was a practical series presented by Core of Culture with Prof Lindsay Gilmour of University of California at Irvine

and Joseph Houseal, director of Core of Culture. Each of the four 90-minute sessions explored different approaches to the documentation of sacred traditions in the Himalayas, and revealed the evolution of fieldwork, dance research and digital documentation over the past 25 years.

These rare and endangered dances are hundreds - even a thousand - years old, ranging across the spiritual landscape from Kashmir, through Zaskar and Ladakh, extending to Himachal and Arunachal Pradesh in India,



and onto Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Japan, China and Tibet.

Special guests at the program were: Newar Tantric priest Prajwal Ratna Vajracharya, wilderness specialist and cinematographer Nathan Whitmond and Ladakhi cultural activist Dr Thinles Dorje.

During the program, Prajwal threw light on the significance of Kaya, Vak and Chitta Mudras. Laying emphasis on the importance of Mudra, Prajwal discussed how certain movements and Mudras effect health and shared yogic exercises for hands, feet, body and energy channels.

Furthermore, Prajwal said: "The hand and finger Mudras represent different energies and moods of deities. The left hand symbolizes the female energy, which is associated with absolute

reality and wisdom and the right hand symbolizes the male energy which is associated with conventional reality and skillful activity. Even the eyes and mouths of the dancing deities express the esoteric feelings and emotions."



Joseph Houseal is founder and director of Core of Culture, a non-profit organization dedicated to safeguarding intangible world heritage with an emphasis on endangered dance and movement tradition in the healing, meditation and martial arts.

Prof Lindsay Gilmour is a performer, choreographer, filmmaker and educator. Her work explores presence, ritual, and rebellion -- fusing text, voice and the moving body.

## **Naam Karan Sanskara Held for a Baby in SW Portland**

Portland, A Naam Karan Sanskara ritual was held by Prajwal for a newly born baby of Dr Ajay Pradhan and Sujana Rajkarnikar at South West Portland on Tuesday, March 12, 2024.



As per the ritual, the new-born baby is kissed by the beak of the duck. That is because a duck on the pond takes only good things and discards the bad and evil



things. "A lot of crazy things are happening in the world. We should be careful. We should take good things and discard bad things like a duck does," said Prajwal.



The Naam Karan Sanskara is performed to give the newborn a name and an identity. The rituals conducted during the ceremony are to seek blessings for the newborn for his/her good health and a long and prosperous life ahead, Prajwal said on the occasion performed a Kalash Puja. The Sanskara is also known as Machabu Byankegu in Newar culture.

## **Nritya Mandala Mahavihara Celebrates Seventh World Newah Day in Portland,**



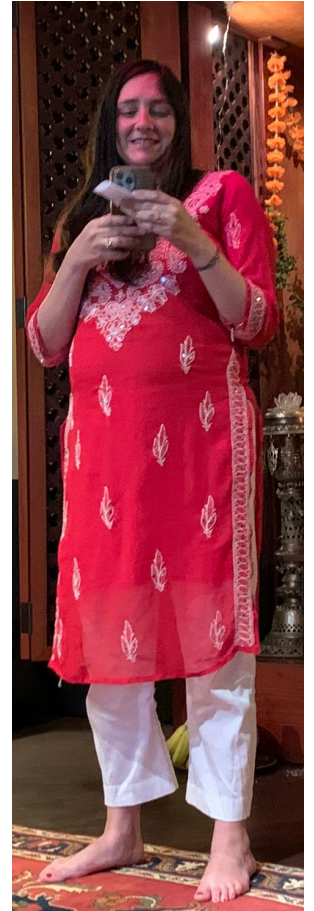
Portland, A program was organized by Nritya Mandala Mahavihara (NMM) and Daya Ratna Shakya, Portland, USA on Saturday, March 30, 2024 to celebrate the seventh World Newah Day. The World Newah Day program organized at Portland's Newar Buddhist temple was a pot-pourri of everything: various scholarly presentations, a Newah dance based on the arrival of the spring, Manjushree charya dance, recitation of poems in Nepal Bhasa, chanting of Buddha Bhajans in Nepal Bhasa, release of a book 'Newarology Matters' and finally a Newah

Bhoye on the Lapte (plate made of green leafs)



Most importantly, the seventh World Newah Day program in Portland kicked off with Halin Newah Mya (World Newah Song). 55 people - among them: the American Buddhists, Newah and Nepalese community members - took part at the Portland's World Newah Day event.

Making a presentation, Teya Desesa-Vajracharya, Prajwal's spouse, said: "I was personally raised in a household of Tibetan Buddhist practitioners from Nyingma tradition. Teya added: "In Newar Buddhism, the deities are dancing and it is so inspiring to witness the beautiful, elaborated, colorful rituals that are performed in this temple."



Daya Ratna Shakya, patron of World Newah Organization (WNO) threw light on the history and activities of the WNO established in 2011 by the London Declaration, and its decision in 2017 to observe the last Saturday of the month of March as World Newah Day. Stressing the need for elaborate works and plans for promoting and preserving Newah language and culture, Shakya expressed the view that it is a unique civilization that is on the verge of extinction due to loss of language and formal education to new generation.

Speaking on the occasion, Adam Bidema, a Sangha member of NMM and a Charya nritya dancer, said: "The Newah people



through culture and rituals have learned to embrace these three things - awakening, emptiness and rebirth. Taking a trip down memory lane about his visit to Nepal, Adam said: "No matter, the kind of Dharma practice we have there in Kathmandu, consciousness comes there to become part of one thing to embrace or become part of the complexity of life -- the rituals, the dances. The reflections and expressions of the unification of this instantness of wisdom and working being the path to this movement."



Culinary educator Bikram Vaidya made a presentation "Newah Culinary Heritage". Addressing the gathering, Vaidya said that Newah people's knowledge, skills and practices have been transferred from generation to generation, and this provides communities with a sense of identity and continuity." The word 'Bhoye' in the context of a feast or meal is derived

from the Sanskrit word 'Bhojan' which means 'meal'. In Nepal, Bhoye or Bhoj refers to a feast or a grand meal, often associated with celebrations, festivals, or special occasions, Vaidya added. He went to say: "Bhoye is a significant part of Newah culture and hospitality, where hosts prepare a variety of dishes to share with guests. During Bhoye, it is an opportunity for people to come together, enjoy delicious food, and celebrate important moments





in life. Newah Bhoys is an elaborate meal, and up to 25 dishes are served during a four course service."

Also, speaking on the occasion, journalist Rabin Man Shakya shed light on the relevance of Nritya Mandala Mahavihara in promoting Newah culture and heritage in the USA and said: "Nritya Mandala Mahavihara was established in Portland with devotion, dedication, and immense

help from Helen Appell, co-founder of the Mahavihara. When it comes to the promotion and preservation of Newar Buddhism, Newar culture and Newar traditions, the role and significance of the Mahavihara is unparalleled comparing to other Nepali community organizations and other Newah organizations in the USA."



Likewise, Ambika Shakya, Anushika S Thapa and Sunil Kumar Thapa presented a very beautiful Newar dance based on the song 'Siri Siri Fasan Jita Kuchu Kuchu Nakkal'. The Nepal Bhasa song is inspired from Basanta Dhun, the ancient folk tune popular along the Nepal Mandala as a celebration, expressing gratitude towards nature.

Furthermore, a very powerful and esoteric Manjushree charya dance was offered by Sangha member Anastasia Roderick. The

vocal rendering for the dance was performed by Sangha member Joshua Proto. Manjushree, the lord of wisdom, holds a book and wields a sword to cut through ignorance. Manjushree is golden in color and speaks the universal language of all beings to aid them in understanding reality.

Moreover, Sangha member Kusumabati Bajracharya presented a Nepal Bhasa poem on 'Ayla' (wine) which explains us that a little bit of wine is even better for health. Sangha member Naveena Shakya recited another Nepal Bhasa poem entitled 'Ma Bhaye' (mother tongue) in which she reiterated the need and importance of speaking in the mother tongue.

Similarly, two Buddha Bhajan songs in Nepal Bhasa (1) Tri Ratna Mhasika and (2) Anityagu Sansar were performed by Joshua Proto, Adam Bidema and Anna Shustrova.



At the end of the program, a book entitled 'Newarology Matters' written by Daya R Shakya was released and presented first to the Pujaris. Journalist Rabin Man Shakya who wrote the foreword for the book made a brief review of the book on the occasion. The program which was conducted by Daya Shakya was followed by a Newah-style Bhoje on the Lapte (plate made of green leafs) and 'Ayla' (wine) being poured from 'Anti'

