Union of Wisdom and Compassion: A 5-day residential retreat with Dance Mandal Hong Kong March 28-April 2nd

Corinne Nakamura-Rybak

Participants immersed themselves in Dharma, movement and the practice of Charya Nritya at the most recent retreat led by Prajwal for Dance Mandal Hong Kong. Workshop participants were both seasoned dancers and beginners; but the retreat was a transformative experience for all… filled with joy, connection, and a deepened practice in Newar Buddhism.

The retreat took place from March 28-April 1st on Lantau Island. A talk and dance performance took place at the Chinese University of Hong Kong Alumni association. On April 2 Prajwal gave a talk, “Happily Living, Happily Dying” and on April 3, a dance performance by Dance Mandal Hong Kong.

Participants retreated to the serene surroundings of LanTau Island where the lush greenery and tranquil landscapes near the impressive “Big Buddha” was the perfect landscape for our dance retreat. Each attendee had the opportunity to both rest from the busy-ness of their lives in HK and to deepen their practice through understanding the history

of Newar Buddhsim and Charya Nritya. The first few days, retreatants caught up on their sleep!

Nestled in the forest of Lantau Island, we were on the grounds of Wai Sum Temple, where we were welcomed by the Abbot and volunteers. We had amazing meals prepared for us each day with comfortable dorm rooms for men and women.

Dance Mandal Hong Kong teachers, Dr. Tina Ho and Eliza Lau carefully developed the workshop curriculum, in consultation with Prajwal, to include meditation, dance practice, Dharma talks, sadhana and an Avalokiteshvara empowerment. Participants had the chance to learn new dances and refine ones they had practiced already.

In addition to classes on Lantau Island and performance at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the retreat offered a few Buddhist activities to compliment the experience. We went to sacred Buddhist sites on Lantau Island: Po Lin Monastery, known for the Big Buddha and visited the Tsz Shan Monastery where there is a 76 meter tall Guan **Yin (Avalokiteshvara). We also took time to** deepen our community connection by dining out with delicious food specialities from HK. Participants had the chance to

meet a team of experienced dance instructors, each bringing their unique expertise and passion to the retreat. With Prajwal leading the retreat, Dance Mandal Hong Kong teachers Dr. Tina Ho and Eliza Lau worked with students of refinements. Founding board member of Nritya Mandala Mahavihara and senior student, Corinne Nakamura-Rybak, from Portland, Oregon, assisted in teaching at the retreat as well.

The retreat was an unforgettable experience filled with movement, laughter, and newfound friendships. Whether participants were seasoned dancers or beginners taking their first Charya Nritya mandala, the retreat inspired, empowered and uplifted their spirits. It was an opportunity to connect with a passion for Charya Nritya and embark on a journey of connection to Newar Buddhism. I look forward to dancing with everyone again soon!

Quotes from some of the participants:

Eliza Lau

It was a unique experience spending 5 days in a retreat with a Charya master. Like a treasure opening up in front of us, wisdom of the ancient Newar tradition abundantly pours forth. I felt that this is exactly what we people shackled by modernity need if we are going to regain the

simplicity of true joy in life. Dancing and singing were practiced and thoroughly enjoyed by every retreatant, boundaries and separation between individuals slowly melting away. This is definitely a path that will take us to rediscover who we really are!

Tina

As one of the coordinators in Dance Mandal (Hong Kong), it is not easy to cooperate with two groups this time, including a temple and a university, and there are too many unexpected challenges. However, this is also a part of spiritual practice. Within one and a half months, from arranging dates, site selection, meals, accommodation, funding, publicity, enrollment, finance, meetings, frequent external and internal contacts, etc., all depended on the cooperation of all parties. Moreover, the lectures and performances had just followed the retreat, and completed within seven days. This was really an examination given by our teacher. I am glad that the participants and guests felt the unique of Vajra Dances and gave us a lot of encouragement and suggestions. I should say, this is also moved by the spirit of Simhamukha with the blessings of the Yogini Mandala!

Saldon

Reflection: How to embody the essence of Vajrayogini in life?

This time, while I am preparing and performing the dance, I focused on one of the main mudra of the Dakini – Skull Cup – to transform all negativities into positive nutrition.

I have been very sick in the past few years, and accumulated paralyzing GREAT FEAR out of draining energy and sensibility. During the retreat and performance, I am aware of how this GREAT FEAR turn into irrational greed and hatred. Once I am aware of this, instead of escape and just being ashamed, I try to transform my negativity, even though the transformation may come a bit late.

Here, heartfelt thanks to our inspiring Sangha:

Eliza: who has been very kind to deal with my negativity while I am not able to transform right on the spot, who teaches me how to just focus on the solution instead of the problem.

Tina: for her motherly care to all her students, consistent practice, and support to Prajwal

Lingling: for her one-pointed focus and diligence in preparing her dance offering.

Corinne: for her charisma, inspiring advice, and her non-attached generosity (she has borrowed her crown to me when I forgot to bring my own)

Last but not least, heartfelt thanks to our beloved Guru Prajwal, who is precious because he embody the genuine Dharma – no hierarchy – and treat his students as equal.

Kerry

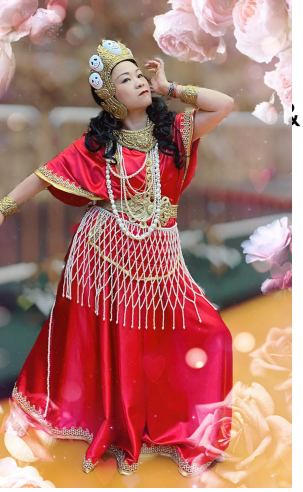
This is my pleasure to join this retreat for practicing vajra dance. We have day to night to practice dance, meditation, singing and also we have Sadhana of initiation of Avalokitesvara in the period of her celebration, which is also sacred blessings for us. Thankful!

Since everyday with dining, practice and living with our teacher, I could feel deeply how to be happy living in our daily life as practicing vajra dance as part of our life and daily life spirit. This time, retreat, gave me a really deep understanding of and transformation.

Also after retreat, we had the chance to perform the vajra dance. This time I really could realize and aware how the relationship with consciousness of Kaya, Vak and Citta. This is an amazing experience, improvement and transformation to me definitely. Thank you so much for the retreat, talk and performance chance from our teacher.

Lok Yee

I am so happy to participate in this donation event. I can



participate in this event with the teacher. It is a blessing and a good experience. I hope the teacher will come to Hong Kong again soon to communicate with everyone. Thank you teacher.

Shira

What a such wonderful experience 。 。 。
As a student, can closely stay with the teacher (Prajwal) to deeply reach the Newar Buddhism & practice the "Charya Nritya" together within these 5 Days ,that's really dreaming for me !!

Patty

This was the first time in my life that I have made a public offering. I would like to express my gratitude to my teachers, Guruji Prajwal R. Vajracharya and Dr. Tina Ho for their teaching and guidance. For this performance, I tried hard to arrange practice in my spare time. I followed my teachers' advice and practice daily, i.e.:

1. to understand the dance text, and to memorize each paragraph.
2. try to express the compassion and joy of Green Tara.

Finally, I don't know if I can do the above during the performance.

Mary

The most impressive moment of the retreat is the moment of

initiation when Guruji Prajwal announced that from then on we shall become Avalokitesvara, and for every moment we live we shall benefit others. I take this as a solemn commitment we've made in front of Avalokitesvara that we have to live accordingly from now on.

Sin Ying

During the Charya Nritya retreat, I'm so honored to learn

Avalokitesvara, Green Tara & Amoghasiddhi full dance. Because included the dharma talk that Guruji Prajwal shared at the retreat, I can gain more understanding of the bodhisattvas and Newar Buddhism through learning their mudras and mantras. Also, our body, mind and speech are aligned while dancing the Charya Nritya. It is important for our practice and benefits our Buddhist path.

Besides, I found myself so easy to be distracted and felt impatient during the retreat because of the unfamiliar daily life pattern. I was so used to work fast and make myself full schedule. So, leaving the busy daily life to feel the present moment was one of my challenges. It helped me to see my inner problem and face my challenges directly. It reminded me to be more internalized.

Moreover, this was my first time to perform Manjusri

bodhisattva solo full dance in the university. I'm so grateful that I can offer the dance and share Manjusri's wisdom to all of the audiences. Besides, I thought that my offering has been improved because I was more focused on the steps and dance moves last time. However, When I'm performing the dance this time, I spoke to myself, "I have two eyes, four arms.....my mandala cannot be destroyed" Just like Manjusri bodhisattva introduced himself to the audience. Therefore, I'm so honored to participate the offering and have the opportunity to be a channel of Manjusri bodhisattva.

Thank you Guruji Prajwal for everything including the wisdoms, knowledge of Buddhism and provide us the opportunity to dance.

Moona

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to participate in this offering. For me, it is not just about physical movements or performing arts. Through practice, I am able to observe my thoughts more easily, take care of my heart, and carry mindfulness into my daily life.

Dickon

During the retreat, I learnt (to my own interpretation) some very useful mudras that can be applied to everyday, such as, wisdom mudras (ok mudras), flower offerings & worship on bended

knees to the Tara in my heart.

Nora

Thoughts after watching Charya Nritya :
In addition to watching the quiet side of the Vajra Dance, we can also watch the wrathful performance of the Wrathful Lord, and the power emanates from the dancers!
I also learned more about the music of Vajra Dance, and I was able to set a goal on how to learn Charya Nritya.

Lee Swee Keong, Art Director of Butoh Dance (audience)
When turning a cultivation method into a performance, multiple performance considerations are required. Because it

was in a university lecture hall, the organizers and presenters had no concept of performance at all. They upheld the diligence and dedication of studying Buddhism, and several Dharma students danced well. But for many technical matters throughout the performance, it is really necessary to find a dedicated person to take charge, so as to add points to the performance. Bless fellow practitioners.

Holene

Unlike other religious tales and mythical stories enacted in form of dance or drama on stage, Charya Nritya is a unique dance form as spiritual practice. Thanks to the production of Dance

Mandal Hong Kong and Guruji Prajwal, we might appreciate such a great performance in which each dancer's life of religious devotion has been shown, exhibiting both divinity and symbols of dharma. With performers' symbolic mudras and energetic movements, as well as the ritual chants and relevant images, audiences (not only as onlookers) might easily visualize and realize the divine beauty and virtue in the night.

Jocelyn (audience)

It was very exciting and compact, or there were a lot of performances, so it was a bit tired at the end!

The most commendable thing is the house program, which is rich in information.

Florence (about retreat)

I knew very little about Vajra Dance. I joined the retreat without knowing anyone other than teacher except Dr. Tina. Anyway, it had been a most enjoyable and wonderful 5 days, staying in a big room of many bunk beds, so we could have wonderful chats and laughter ... reminded me of teenage time, the school camps.

I learnt Buddhism from a different angle... wider and deeper meaning of many terms that I knew of for decades, and since my primary Buddhist school (learnt in Chinese language). e.g. "sangha" - in "Namo Buddha, Namo Dharma, Namo Sangha" ~ Sangha translated to Chinese is "Monks". On the first day, Prajwal said we (20 of us) are "sangha" - that we learn and

practice Buddha teaching together as a group. How wonderful to be a member of Sangha!

The teaching, dancing, chanting and empowerment, ritual… in Sanskrit and in English were sometimes a little confusing to me but all meaningful. I had enlightenments in different ways through these 5 days and beyond.

The chanting voice of the "unidentifiable man voice" during the empowerment is so beautiful and a special experience, too.

Lingling

The retreat time is allocated well. Grateful!

Fai (audience)

I think the image at the back is so beautiful that it can relate to the dancers' costumes and imagery. Maybe the dance music playlist can be reordered in Number+dance name. This way you can avoid playing the wrong music. In addition, when finishing a piece, the volume can be faded out without sharp cut, so the audience experience will be smoother. Overall it is a good sharing.

Without Mudra, There is no Mahamudra, says Vajracharya

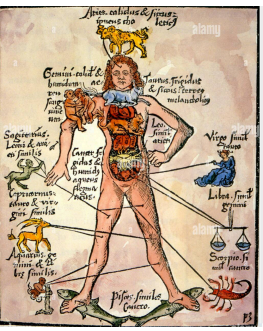
Teaching on 'Mahamudra in Newar Buddhism'

By Rabin Man Shakya

April 21 A virtual teaching and presentation on "Mahamudra in Newar Buddhism" was organized by Dance Mandal Hong Kong on Saturday, April 20, 2024. Giving the historical details about Mudra, the Guruji said that first Mudra text is mentioned in Mahavairochana Sutra (850 to 557 BC). Mudra is also mentioned in Amoghavajra Sutra (746 to 771 BC).

Referring to Yoga Ratna Mala (ancient text), the Guruji observed that Mudra is a powerful essence, no one can destroy or break it down, it is like Vajra. In Yogini Tantra, there are four different Mudras: Samaya Mudra, Karma Mudra and Dharma Mudra, and all these Mudras guide you to Mahamudra, said the Guruji.

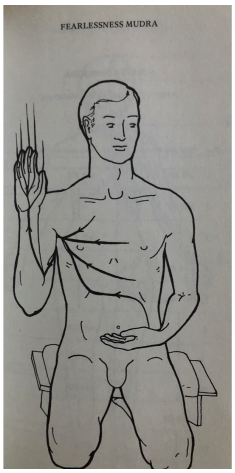
The presentation emphasized the importance of Mudra through subtle fluidity of movement, breath and stillness.

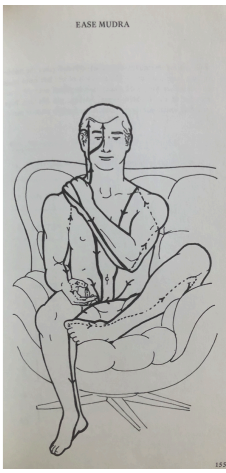


The Guruji stressed the need to embody Kaya, Vak and Chitta, and underscored the importance of awakening and connecting through learning the Kaya Mudra, Vak Mudra and Chitta Mudra.

"Kaya is the body, Vak is the speech and Chitta is the mind." Prajwal Guruji reiterated that any Mudra that is made cannot be separated from Kaya, Vak and Chitta. "Our every gesture is connected with body, speech and mind," he went on saying.

For some people, Mahamudra may look like a complicated study, but in fact it is very simple. If you live your life happily and if you die a happy man, that, in my opinion, is the Mahamudra, said the Portland based Newar Buddhist scholar.

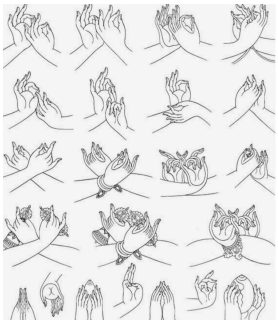


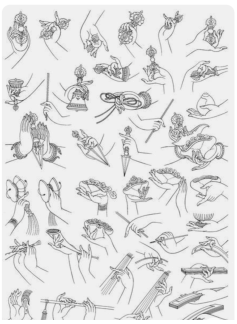


Lauding the contributions of Mahasiddhas and Arahatas in Buddhism, the Guruji said:" There were 75 Mahasiddhas in Newar Vajrayana Buddhism. In Indian tradition, there were 84 masters whereas in Theravada there were 500 Arahatas. All of these great saints had achieved Mahamudra." The Guruji also touched on the ancient and medieval Mahasiddhas like Shantikaracharya, the first Vajracharya guru of the Nepal Mandala, Surat Vajra Vajracharya, Lila Vajra Vajracharya, Manju Vajra Vajracharya and so on.

"Basic understanding of the Mudra is important in Newar Buddhist tradition, because without Mudra, there is no Mahamudra, said the Guruji.

Mudra is the pathway to knowledge, a pathway to achieve the wisdom, a pathway to achieve skillful means, the Guruji added.





The virtual presentation comprehensively delved into Mahamudra according to Newar Vajrayana tradition.

The teaching shed light on the significance of Mahamudra, on how to achieve Mahamudra through Mudra, on how to transform our mind and body through Mahamudra.

Prajwal Guruji during the presentation discussed how certain movements and Mudras effect health and create transformations in our bodies, how it heals our hands, feet and energy channels.

At the end of the teaching, Prajwal Guruji replied to the questions of the participants.