

Volunteers, Pujaris and Community Members Recognized for Dedication

Rabin Man Shakya

Portland, Jan 25, A program was organized by Nriya Mandala Mahavihara at the temple in Portland on Saturday, Jan 25 2025 to honor and recognize volunteers, Pujaris and community members.



The event kicked off with the chanting of 'Three Jewels of Buddhism' - Buddham Sharanam Gacchami. 'Three Jewels Of Buddhism' was actually initiated on the zoom by the Sangha members of Hong Kong Buddhist Studies Association and was followed by all the Sangha members of the Vihara.

After that, a refuge dance (a performance of Buddha Bandana dance through Charya Nriya) was performed by Prajwal Vajracharya, Joshua Proto and Naveena Shakya. Buddhist practitioners take refuge daily in the Buddha - the teacher, the Dharma - the teaching and the Sangha - the community. In Charya Nriya tradition, a practitioner takes refuge through embodiment of these 'three jewels' - the Buddha as the teacher of meditation, Shakya



Muni Buddha, the Dharma teachings as Manjushree wielding his wisdom sword and texts, the Sangha as the supportive community in the form of compassion



To mark the joyous event, Sangha member Anna Shustrova performed esoteric Charya Nritya dance 'Vajrayogini'. This Charya Nritya dance is named after the Goddess Vajrayogini. It is one of the ancient classical Charya dances of Nepal. According to Tantric Vajrayana Buddhism, there are four yoginis or Tantric Goddesses in the Kathmandu valley. This dance is performed especially as a devotion to the Goddess Vajrayogini in Sankhu in the Kathmandu valley. In this dance, symbolic movements of hands and legs are skillfully timed with general body movement and facial expressions. This dance shows beautiful mixture, strong sense of protection, preservation, anger and peaceful emotions. Charya giti singing for the dance 'Vajrayogini' was rendered very skillfully by seasoned Charya singer Joshua Proto.



Similarly, a Buddha Bhajan song 'Anityagu Sansara' was performed by Prajwal Vajracharya, Joshua Proto and Adam Bidema in Nepal Bhasa.

Speaking on the occasion, secretary of Nepali Association of Oregon (NAO) Punam Glee said: "The Nepali community in Portland and Oregon may not be

one of the largest in the US." But she added: "We are lucky that we have a Vihara here in Portland that not only promotes Buddhism but also helps foster a sense of community and nurture Nepalese traditions."

Sangha member Laxman Shakya from Seattle said: "It is religious belief, religious practice and rituals and community of harmony that holds us together."

Sangha member Joshua Proto emphasized the need for more community participation at the Vihara. Likewise, board members of the Vihara Kuon Hunt, Corinne Nakamura

and Uppa Shakya threw light on the role of the Vihara for the community.

It is to be noted that Nritya Mandala Mahavihara, which is the only one Vajrayana Buddhist monastery in the West, was launched in Portland, USA by Helen Appell and Prajwal Guruji in 2009.

Addressing the gathering, Prajwal Vajracharya, co-founder of Nritya Mandala Mahavihara said: "The Vihara, which was established 15 years ago, is always grateful to its Pujaris, volunteers and community members. The Vihara has not been able to honor and recognize them. But today I am very happy and proud to felicitate and honor them."



Talking about contributions of Pujaris and volunteers, Prajwal Guruji said: "The Vihara served the local Nepali community for last 15 years, and also a lot of volunteers and Pujaris helped Vihara in many ways."

The Guruji went on saying: "Today we are honoring the Pujaris and volunteers in gratitude of the hard work, devotion and dedication to our community, to thank and show our deep appreciation for you." "This Vihara would not be here without your support", added the Guruji pointing to the volunteers, Pujaris and community members.



A number of volunteers were recognized on the occasion and those honored included Laxman Shakya, Anirudra Muni Shakya, Dale Hunt, John Ryback, Dave Sage, Gabriel Quitslund and so on.



The Pujaris who were honored on the occasion included: Adam Bidema, Dmitri Skvortsov-Anna Shustrova, Anastasia Roderick, Ashley Low-Casey Redman, Joshua Proto-Stormy Hoebelhenrich, Naveena Shakya-Rabin Man Shakya and so on. According to Prajwal Guruji, a total of 60 people from the community were

honored at the event which was followed by a sumptuous dinner.

The personalities who were recognized by the Vihara were presented with a 'Certificate of Honor' and a Golden Memento 'Gajur' (pinnacle of a temple).



Program at Chicago University Club Aims to Preserve 'Endangered Dances of the Himalayas'

Jan 30th, A program focusing on 'Endangered Dances of Himalayas' was organized at the University Club in Chicago on

Thursday, Jan 30, 2025. The event was a mystical evening of the

ancient and esoteric: live Charya dances, other Buddhist dance films by Core of Culture, and conversation. Kicking off the conversation, Joseph

Houseal, director of Core of Culture, offered a detailed and comprehensive presentation on the endangered dances of the Himalayas. Houseal

warned that if proper and appropriate steps are not taken by the concerned authorities and states, a

number of ancient dances of the Himalayas would disappear soon from the world.

Houseal's conversation dealt with ancient and medieval dance culture from Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet and Ladakh. He said: "These rare and endangered dances are hundreds - even a thousand or more years old, ranging across the spiritual landscape from Kashmir, through Zanskar and Ladakh, extending to Himachal and Arunachal Pradesh in India, and onto Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet."

Similarly, talking about Prajwal's contributions to preservation of ancient Charya dance of Nepal, Houseal said, "In fact, Prajwal's father Ratna Kaji Vajracharya was the one who worked very hard to



preserve and promote Charya tradition and expose this ancient dance culture to the world."

Prajwal said that Charya Nritya is an ancient Buddhist ritual dance with a history going back to more than 1,000 years. The audience marveled at this, something that they had never known.

Prajwal, who is a 35th generation Vajrayana priest, noted that Charya is performed by Newar Buddhist priests known as Vajracharyas as part of their esoteric meditation practices and rituals. Charya dance is an essential part of Newar Vajrayana Buddhism, said Prajwal

adding: "Charya is a meditational dance that tells

stories of the inner qualities and awakening of Buddhist deities." Prajwal went on saying, "Once on the verge of extinction, Charya dance tradition is now attracting more and more people. Today, Charya dance practice is a part of studies at many colleges and universities."

On the occasion, Prajwal Vajracharya - who is also a ritual master of both the Charya Nritya dance tradition and other ritual forms performed by Newar Vajrayana lineage - presented two ancient Charya dances: Vajrapani Charya Nritya at the beginning of the program and Vajrasattva Charya Nritya at the end of the event.

The first Charya Nritya 'Vajrapani' is a wrathful Bodhisattva dark blue in color, bloodshot eyes, and an angry glare. He holds a bell in his left hand and a Vajra in his right, and wears a tiger-skin garment, snakes wrapping around his body, and ornaments made of bones and skulls. Wrathful deities dance upon the negative forces they have overcome



and laugh with glee as they feast on raw painful negativity, the very means to enlightenment.

The second and last Charya Nritya performed by Prajwal at Chicago event was 'Vajrasattva'. Vajrasattva is considered the essence of all the peaceful Buddha families. Vajrasattva is peaceful in appearance, white in color with one face and two hands, seated in Vajra posture. Vajrasattva has upright gold Vajra in right hand at the level of heart while his left hand carries a Vajra-handled bell turned up at the left hip. Vocal rendition in Sanskrit language for both the Charya Nritya dances 'Vajrapani' and 'Vajrasattva' was brilliantly performed by Joshua Proto, a Sangha member of the Mahavihara and a seasoned Charya Giti singer.



Two dance video offerings were shared in between the opening and concluding Charya dances. *Ocean of Mudra* is a wordless short dance film produced by Core of Culture, directed by Lindsay Gilmour, with cinematography and score by Nathan Whitmont. Set within high-altitude Buddhist monasteries in Ladakh, it features mudra, the esoteric sign language of the

ancient world, shimmering as a modern, multi-generational reality and offers a lively first-hand look inside monastic life.

Cham Quad-split is a 4-screen museum installation created after five years of dance research and documentation during the final five years of the absolute monarchy in the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan. It features the monastic meditation-in-motion, Cham. This 10-minute visual and musical installation has been shown at museums around the world, and this evening marks its

Chicago premiere. Directed by Joseph Houseal, camera by Gerard Houghton and Karma Tshering. Edited by Matt Hoffman. Original score by Sandy Hoover.

Joseph Houseal is founder and director of Core of Culture, a Chicago-based 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. After a decades long international career as a dancer, choreographer and director, Houseal began working with ancient Asian dance traditions and has spent the past 25 years working in cultural preservation of sacred dance traditions in Himalayas and beyond.

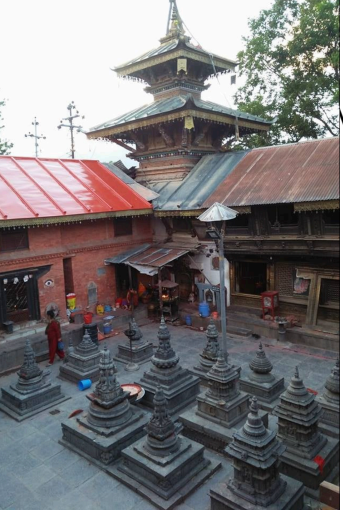
Deity Akash Yogini is Also the Wisdom Goddess, Says Prajwal Guruji

Portland, Jan 18, Vidhyadhari, 'the knowledge holder' manifests as one of the four principal aspects of Vajrayogini in the Newar Vajrayana Buddhist tradition, wherein she is commonly known as Bijeshwari Devi. This Yogini is known by different names: Bijeshwari, Vidhyadhari (Wisdom Goddess, Knowledge Holder), Akash Yogini (Sky Dakini) etc.



These were some of the interesting facts shared by noted Charya Nritya guru Prajwal Vajracharya during an





on-line teaching on 'Akash Yogini' organized by Hong Kong Buddhist Studies Association on Saturday, Jan 18, 2025.

Prajwal Guruji started his remotely-held teaching by chanting a Sanskrit shloka related to Akash Yogini charya nritya:



'Namaste bidhyadhari devi Akash Yogini yatha

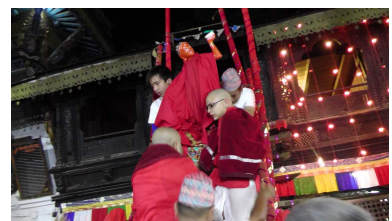
Riddhi siddhi pradayani sri Buddha dakini namah 2'

He then explained the meaning of the Sanskrit shloka to the zoom participants.

Welcoming the zoom guests, Prajwal Guruji expressed his happiness to share his knowledge and information about Goddess Akash Yogini with the activists of the Hong Kong Dance Mandal.

"A special shrine is dedicated to Akash Yogini above the western bank of river Bishnumati on the road to Swayambhu chaitya. The shrine is known as Bijeshwari temple or also as Besa among the Newar Buddhists in the Kathmandu valley," Prajwal Guruji informed the participants of the virtual teaching.

The Guruji also shared information about the once-in-a-twelve year festival being held at Bijeshwari temple in which the head of the state - President of the Nation - and also the Living Goddess Kumari have to attend mandatorily.



During the presentation, the Guruji also displayed pictures of Paubhas and statues of Akash Yogini. Much of Prajwal Guruji's on-line teaching was focused on the subtle iconography of Akash Yogini.

He said: "The name of this Charya Nritya dance is Bidhyadhari Devi/ Akash Yogini. Its raga is Trabali and Taal is Trihura."



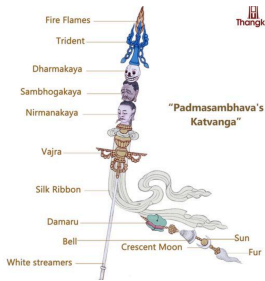
The Guruji noted: "Just like Vajrayogini, Khadgayogini and Vajravarahi, she is semi-wrathful. She is red in color, has three eyes, two arms, one face with beautiful hair. She hails from Odhiyana, the land of Dakinis.

All the Yoginis are Sarva Buddha Dakinis coming from Buddha nature, that is why she is also called Buddha Dakini Devi."

He further added: "Akash Yogini originates from the seed syllable 'Bum' (Heart Mantra). She is depicted leaping into space in the flying posture of a sky-going dakini, with her right leg bent back at the knee."

The Guruji stated: "Akash Yogini holds Khatvanga marked with a Vajra - a magic stick with magic power -- on her left hand. Similarly, she drinks from a skull cup. She holds a Katri (chopper) on her right hand."





Underscoring the importance of weapons that the Dakinis hold in their hands, the Guruji stressed: "Why do the Dakinis hold weapons like Khatvanga and Katri? Not for killing sentient beings. Back in those days, the Dakinis lived in the dangerous jungles and they had to maintain the Yogic traditions, cutting through pathways to be clear, holding them as magical tools and power."

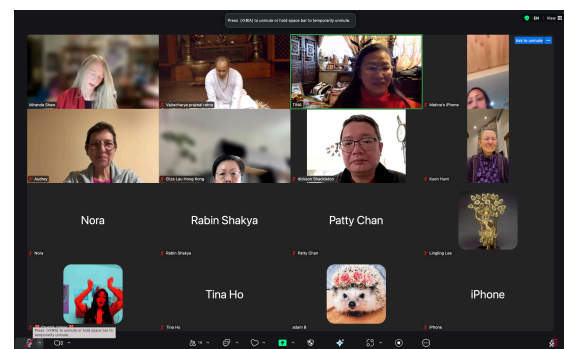
Different kinds of ornaments are profusely used by the Dakinis, said Prajwal Guruji and added: "The symbolism of the ornaments is also important. They are associated with six Paramitas - Daan (generosity), Sila (discipline), Ksanti (patience), Virya (diligence), Dhyana (meditation) and Prajna (wisdom).



Speaking about the bone ornaments, Prajwal Guruji said: "Bone ornaments and human skulls are also used in the Sky Dakini Charya dance. They symbolize the bone energy and earth energy."

At the end of the virtual presentation which was participated by about 20 people, mostly the Sangha members of the Hong Kong Dance Mandal, Prajwal Guruji also answered the questions of the zoom participants.

This is the first part of discussion on Akash Yogini. The second and more advanced part of Akash Yogini teaching is



scheduled for the month of February, the Guruji informed the participants.

Portland Baha Celebrates New Year 2025 with Purification Rituals

Portland, Jan 1, The Nepalese Buddhist temple in Portland - Nritya Mandala Mahavihara - bade farewell to 2024 and greeted the new year 2025 by performing and chanting Gurumandal Puja on Wednesday, Jan 1, 2025.

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

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 participants. 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 inside the temple.

The traditional community ceremony honored oneself and others by making offerings of purified elements and was guided by using one's own Mandala on sand. Siphon Luyingu ritual was also performed during the purification ceremony.

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. The purification ritual was attended by 20 people at the Portland Baha.