50th anniversary celebration of Vishwa Shanti Stupa

The famous Shanti Stupa (Peace Pagoda) built atop the Rajgir hills, surrounded by a forest and accessed both by a ropeway and by foot, will mark its 50th anniversary, later this month on 25 October 2019. The temple was conceptualized and gifted by famous Buddhist philanthropist and monk Nichidatsu Fujii Guruji of Japan.

International delegates from Asia and Europe gathered in the Mongolian capital with the aim to create a conducive and compelling eco-system with the objective of emphasizing the importance of dialogue and understanding for avoiding conflicts and bring environment consciousness in global dialogue and restructuring conflicts and bring environment consciousness in global dialogue and restructuring.

The International Buddhist Confederation (IBC) in collaboration with Inner Path is organizing a Buddhist Film Festival in Delhi from October 10-13, 2019. The festival later moves to Nepal and will be held on October 18-19, 2019.

Four editions of the Festival have been held so far, and audiences have been increasing rapidly. This year it will be held at the National Gallery of Modern Art, over four days.

The Inner Path Festival is the pioneering festival in India of Buddhist philosophy, aesthetics, art, culture and films. Launched in 2013, The Inner Path attempts to take

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COUNCIL OF PATRONS

- His Holiness Thich Tri Quang
  Deputy Patriarch, Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, Vietnam
- His Holiness Samdech Preah Agga Maha Sangharajadhipati Tep Vong
  Supreme Patriarch, Mahanikaya Order, Cambodia
- His Holiness Dr. Bhaddanta Kumarabhivamsa
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- His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama
  Tenzin Gyatso India (Tibet in Exile)
- His Eminence Rev. Khamba Lama Gabju Choijams
  Supreme Head of Mongolian Buddhists, Mongolia
- His Eminence 24th Pandito Khamba Lama Damba Ayusheev
  Supreme Head of Russian Buddhists, Russia
- His Holiness Late Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara Suvaddhana Mahathera
  Supreme Patriarch, Thailand
- His Holiness Late Phra Achan Maha Phong Samaleuk
  Sangharaja, Laos
- His Holiness Late Aggamaha Pandita Davuldena Gnanissara Maha Nikaya Thero
  Mahanayaka, Amarapura Nikaya, Sri Lanka

SAMBAD III

Ulaanbaatar conclave unites Buddhist leaders across Asia

Performers at the opening of Battsagaan Grand Assembly Hall on September 6. Photo: Raymond Lam
Samvad III: Ulaanbaatar conclave unites Buddhist leaders across Asia

A conclave unites Buddhist leaders across Asia

The Inner Path Festival

The resurgence in Buddhist thought to a wider range of urban audiences at a time when violence and strife disrupt the fundamentals of our civilization and culture. Each edition of the Festival presents to its audience works of visual and performing arts and other forms of creative expression, philosophy, discourse and discussions related to Buddhism and nationalism. The Festival has been held since 2009 with a wide range of events in different cities.

The Discourse at Inner Path festival

- Ven. Dr. Dhammapa, Secretary General, IBC
- Most Ven. Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery, HP and member of IBC’s Governing Council
- Ven. Gyaltan Samten, New Delhi and Prof. K.T.S. Saran, Head, Department of Buddhist Studies, Delhi University
- Some of the films to be shown are Becoming Who I Was South Korea 2017; Directors: Moon Chang-Yong and Jeon Jin; Painting Life India 2018; Director: Bijukumar Damodaran; Prophecy Bhutan 2016; Director: Zuri Rinpoche; A Thousand Mothers USA 2017; Director: Kim Shelton.

Khamba Lama Gala speaks to a reporter about the conclave and exhibits on September 7.

Photo Raymond Lam.

The Inner Path Festival

Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks (pre-recorded) to Samvad delegates inside Battasgaan Grand Assembly Hall on September 6. Photo: Raymond Lam.

Samvad III: Ulaanbaatar

Samvad III: Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia on September 6, 2017.

Samvad III: Ulaanbaatar

The Samvad series has been ongoing since 2015, when Indian and Japanese prime ministers Narendra Modi and Shinzo Abe began working together to apply the spiritual teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism to address modern-day issues threatening human civilization. The event was also one of national importance for Mongolia. Myanmar was the host to the second Samvad conclave in 2017.

This year’s inauguration of Samvad was timed to coincide with the opening of the new Battasgaan Grand Assembly Hall at Gandan where the consecration of the Buddha Statue and His two chief disciples gifted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Je Tsongkhapa statue gifted by HH the Dalai Lama and the statue of Ondor Gegeen Bogd Jevzundamba of Mongolia gifted by the former President of Mongolia was undertaken.

The Grand Assembly Hall has a multi-purpose structure for religious events on the third floor, exhibition and conference spaces on the second floor, and a reception hall on the ground floor. Many residents from around Ulaanbaatar and beyond attended the inauguration on September 6, with the delegates welcomed by a series of cultural performances highlighting Mongolian long song, orchestral music, khoomii (throat) singing, and folk dancing. Nepalese Buddhist singer and activist Ani Choying Drolma also gave a performance of her distinctive Bhutanese chanting.

The ceremonial opening of the Grand Assembly Hall’s doors was succeeded by a succession of speeches by the religious and political stakeholders of this event. The abbot of Gandan, His Eminence Khamba Lama Galbu Choijamts Denbherd, gave a keynote that was followed by a speech from the prime minister of Mongolia, Khurelsukh Ukhnaa. Swaminathan Gurumurthy, chairman of the VIF and director of the Reserve Bank of India, highlighted the Indian perspective on conflict avoidance and environmental awareness. Both the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and His Holiness the Dalai Lama gave separate, pre-recorded speeches felicitating the conference. The Japanese ambassador to Mongolia, Takaoka Masato, delivered a text address from Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, stressing the common goals, shared text address from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Je Tsongkhapa statue gifted by HH the Dalai Lama and the statue of Ondor Gegeen Bogd Jevzundamba of Mongolia gifted by the former President of Mongolia was undertaken.

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The inner path festival

The Inner Path Festival is an annual event organized by The Inner Path Foundation, which promotes Asian cinema and culture. The festival was first held in 2009 and has since then been held in various cities across Asia. The festival showcases films from countries such as India, Bhutan, and Mongolia, and includes discussions and workshops on Buddhism and nationalism.

The Discourse at Inner Path Festival

The Discourse at Inner Path Festival will be conducted by Ven. Dr. Dhammapa, Secretary General, IBC; Most Ven. Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery, HP and member of IBC’s Governing Council; Ven. Gyaltan Samten, New Delhi and Prof. K.T.S. Saran, Head, Department of Buddhist Studies, Delhi University.

Some of the key speakers for the sessions on discourse and philosophy are Ven. Dr. Dhammapa, Secretary General, IBC; Most Ven. Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery, HP and member of IBC’s Governing Council; Ven. Gyaltan Samten, New Delhi and Prof. K.T.S. Saran, Head, Department of Buddhist Studies, Delhi University.

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Nagarjuna was the founder of Madhyamaka Buddhism who transformed the understanding of Buddhist traditions for future millennia, but the man remains an enigma. Nagarjuna’s visionary interpretation of the concept of the emptiness of all things and his substantial body of Buddhist works earned him the sobriquet of ‘The Second Buddha’ in the Mahayana tradition, but precious little is known about his actual life.

There are constant contradictions about Nagarjuna’s lifespan but the second century AD seems to be widely accepted as the broad period, with the years of his life placed around 150–250 AD. This seems to tally with the life of his foremost disciple, Aryadeva, who was the author of the treatise ‘Four Hundred Verses on the Middle Way,’ a work which records the actions of a Bodhisattva’s yoga. Nagarjuna, together with Aryadeva, is credited with founding the Madhyamaka School of Mahayana Buddhism.

This also means that Tibetan sources that place his emigration from the Andhra region to Nalanda University, in present-day Bihar, are basically accurate. Nagarjuna eventually became the abbot of Nalanda.

Nagarjuna, through the great merit he had earned, fulfilled the superhuman task of living on the ocean bed to teach the Nagas. He made them many offerings and satisfied them on every score. Pleased, the Naga king presented him with the Hundred Thousand Verse, the Prajnaparamita Sutra.

While Nagarjuna is particularly associated with the Prajnaparamita Sutra, he is truly famous for his writings on emptiness. His magnum opus is the Madhyamaka Shastra (Treatise on the Middle Way), also known as Mulamadhyamakakarika (Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way). His theme is the Bodhisattva’s path to Buddhahood.

Enlightenment may be achieved by acquiring merit and the perfection of wisdom, meaning knowledge of emptiness. Within the Tibetan tradition especially, Nagarjuna is viewed as the second Buddha.

By the time Nagarjuna had matured as a philosopher, the concept of ‘zero’ had shaken up all existing metaphysical systems of philosophy. Since the third century BC, the freshly minted concept of zero had been helping to redefine the world. Nagarjuna took the new concept of emptiness, the void, and changed Buddhism.

The Tathagata Buddha (the One Who Came and Went) was transformed only because of this nature of interdependence and emptiness of all phenomena. It signified the hope of change and enlightenment for all.

Nagarjuna said that whatever phenomenon arises is empty of eternal essence, and to recognise it as such is the middle path. To realise it, we have to be conscious of how we live, of what we do, of how we interact with each other and with the earth; in short, mindful living.

Nagarjuna gave hope to our perennial quest to understand the world and ourselves. So far, all phenomena had been viewed as being fixed and their inherent substance as stable and unchanging. Good was good and bad was bad; the turbulent suffering of ignorant material life was the opposite of the enlightened spiritual existence and the wheel of samsara, of anguish and pain, was the opposite of the bliss of nirvana. He showed us that change and transformation, including enlightenment, is possible because of interdependence. Phenomena are open to change precisely because they lack inherent fixed nature and are, therefore, empty. The very nature of our existence and all the phenomena around us is emptiness and interdependence, which is why the Buddha too was transformed.

His analysis deconstructed the world to show that nothing is incontrovertible, nothing has immutable essence. Instead, everything flows into each other and existence is interdependence. The kernel of bliss already exists in suffering. Material deprivation can lead to spiritual treasure. Conflict can blossom into friendship. Samsara can flow into nirvana. All conceivable change is indeed our nature and that’s where we enter the realm of freedom of individual choice. In fact, it is up to us. Things can go either way, so the direction in which they go can be shaped by our deeds. Realisation depends on what we do and how we exist within the world. The law of karma is operated by us. He showed that Buddhism does not belong merely inside the covers of sacred texts or within the walls of monasteries but on the street and in the minutiae of our daily lives. It is one of the most empowering messages the world has ever heard. The Buddhist must constantly reform himself and transform the world around him. That is the true mission of Buddhism.

We could be transformed if we move purposefully on that path. First, however, we must understand our own nature. The Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama Shakyamuni, had already signalled that he preferred us to spend our valuable time, rationed by life, on self-mastery instead of pondering on ultimate knowledge. He pointedly refused to respond to metaphysical questions about the existence of God and the beginning or end of the world. Instead, he placed emphasis on directing our energy to understanding and curing mental ills, destructive psychological tendencies and attachments.

When a human being is kept constantly on the boil by emotions, where is the need to seek an answer to the end of the world? Until and unless human beings introspect and develop a state of meditative enlightenment, they will be trapped in ignorance and suffering. Knowledge can alleviate suffering, but one has to work for that. The Buddha provided the Four Errors (Catuskoti) denial method to discourage futile metaphysical meanderings. His response to the question about the beginning of the world was to say: i) the world does not have a beginning ii) it does not have a beginning iii) It does not have

This is the third in a series on the Great Masters

Nagarjuna- the Second Buddha
(150-250 AD) and the concept of emptiness

Nagarjuna in the Dharmachakra mudra with Manjushri in the clouds

Naga princesses hold blazing wish-fulfilling jewels. The Dzi stones said to originate from Naga realms, are also depicted

Tibetan sources that place his emigration from the Andhra region to Nalanda University, in present-day Bihar, are basically accurate. Nagarjuna eventually became the abbot of Nalanda

Nagarjuna - the Second Buddha: A Second Buddha, whether of today or any other age, is a phenomenon that seems to tally with the life of his foremost disciple, Aryadeva, who was the author of the treatise ‘Four Hundred Verses on the Middle Way,’ a work which records the actions of a Bodhisattva’s yoga. Nagarjuna, together with Aryadeva, is credited with founding the Madhyamaka School of Mahayana Buddhism.

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We could be transformed if we move purposefully on that path. First, however, we must understand our own nature. The Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama Shakyamuni, had already signalled that he preferred us to spend our valuable time, rationed by life, on self-mastery instead of pondering on ultimate knowledge. He pointedly refused to respond to metaphysical questions about the existence of God and the beginning or end of the world. Instead, he placed emphasis on directing our energy to understanding and curing mental ills, destructive psychological tendencies and attachments.

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“Nagarjuna is someone for whom I have immense admiration. As soon as I wake up in the morning, I recite a verse he wrote in praise of the Buddha and his explanation of emptiness. In the Buddhist tradition, the Buddha taught us to test and verify his teaching through reason and analysis, and that is what Nagarjuna and other masters of the ancient Nalanda University have done. This scientific approach is a unique feature of the Buddhist tradition. Nagarjuna made clear that while the teachings found in the Sanskrit Mahayana tradition are more profound than the teachings found in the Pali tradition, they do not contradict the Pali teachings. The Mahayana scriptures elaborate on themes presented and first developed in the earlier teachings of the Buddha, giving deeper and more detailed explanations of the ideas they contained. He explained that the reason we seek to understand the complex explanations of sanyûta (shoonyuta) or emptiness (void) is to understand reality and to eliminate wrong views and distorted ways of thinking. Wrong view here relates to the second of the Four Noble Truths, the origin of suffering. Once we begin to understand wisdom and eliminate wrong view, we may glimpse that achieving liberation actually is possible. The Buddha emphasized the development of wisdom as the remedy for overcoming ignorance. And what is wisdom? It is understanding of ultimate reality, of reality as it is. Ignorance pervades all our perceptions and in order to overcome it we cultivate an understanding of emptiness and dependent origination. Nagarjuna referred to these teachings as being like treasure. The explanation of how things arise in dependence on causes and conditions may also arouse in us a deep concern for others, which we call compassion. And compassion teaches us the value of non-harming, non-violence, which is a fitting panacea for the ills and sorrows of the world. Indian civilisation has given rise to a long series of great thinkers and teachers endowed with both human intelligence and a sense of responsibility towards the community. The leading India nuclear physicist Raja Ramanna once told me that he had read one of Nagarjuna’s texts and was amazed and proud to find an account that accords with much of what quantum physics is saying today. Similarly, ancient Indian texts are a treasure trove of knowledge about the mind and its working. I believe they still have relevance today in the twenty-first century. Because India and her people have, from ancient times cherished a rich and sophisticated philosophy of non-violence at the core of their heart, tolerance and pluralism have also flourished. These values, elaborated on by masters like Nagarjuna, continue to have great importance in the world we live in today and it is my conviction that India should take a stronger lead in presenting them to the world.”

The IBC organized a two-day International Symposium on Scholarships for studying Buddhism in India on 20-21 July, 2019 in New Delhi. The scholarships will be available to foreign students for Buddhist studies in India. Based on the inputs received from the participating universities and the delegates, the IBC in consultation with an expert committee especially formed for this purpose is presently working out the detailed procedure and modalities of the scholarships programme, including the shortlisting of prospective universities, the courses and the number of slots to be offered. The IBC scholarship scheme, including the shortlisting of prospective universities, the courses and the number of slots to be offered, will be available to foreign students to pursue higher studies in Indian Universities.

“I am glad to share that this year ICCR supports IBC efforts for promoting interactions and exchanges among Buddhist scholars and researchers. In his address as the Chief Guest, Mr. Mishra said ICCR “attached the highest priority to promoting and nurturing relations with other countries in the field of education and intellectual, and academic exchanges. Annually, ICCR offers about 4,000 scholarships for foreign students to pursue higher studies in Indian Universities. ”

HH the Dalai Lama on Nagarjuna

Excerpts from Nagarjuna - the Second Buddha by Mohini Kent, Global Envoy IBC. Series Editor (Books on the Great Masters ) Aruna Znadav Publisher: Wisdom Tree

Participants at the concluding session of the Symposium, New Delhi, July 21, 2019.
Buddhism in Russia

Buddhism in Russia came through Mongolia during the second half of the 16th century, though Buddhism spread from Tibet to Mongolia in the beginning of the 13th century, says Prof. Victoria Demenova, Director of the Art History, Culture Studies and Design Department at the Ural Federal University of Russia; however, it was only in the second half of the 16th century that it became the state religion of the Mongol Princes.

At a fundamental level, Collections in Russian Museums’ in Delhi at INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage), in late September; Prof Demenova dwelling on the history said “the Eastern religion now formed an integral part of our country. Buddhism is an important subject for researchers and art collectors.”

Buddhism is one of the three official religions in Russia. The official Russian religions include Orthodox Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. Orthodox Christianity is certainly the most widespread and old tradition; however, Buddhism has over four centuries of history in Russia. Until the end of the twentieth century, out of about 150 ethnic groups living in Russia, three were officially recognized as Buddhist.

These were the Buryats, the Kalmyks and the Tuvans. From these three Kalmyks were the first to become a part of the Russian Empire. They were the descendants of the Orkats who moved from Western Mongolia to the steps of the Lower Volga region in early 17th century. Today, this area is known as the Republic of Kalmykia.

The Kalmyks officially converted to Buddhism around late 16th century, although by that time they were already familiar with Buddhism for three hundred years. As a result, when Kalmyks became a part of the Russian Empire, they were already Buddhists.

The second Buddhist people were Buryats. Their first permanent temple in Transbaikal region - was built only in the mid-18th century. In 1741, Emperor Elizaveta Petrovna signed a decree officially accepting Buddhism as the Buryat religion: in 1991, the Republic of Buryatia commemorated their 250th anniversary of this Decree.

Another famous Russia Empress, Catherine the Great, established by her Supreme Decree the position of Pundito Khambo-Lama, head of Russian Buddhists in Eastern Siberia and Transbaikal region. Catherine the Great was recognized as one of the main instigators of Buddhism in Russia.

In 1764, head lama of Tsongoi datsan was officially recognized as the Chief Lama of Transbaikalian Buryats, receiving a title of Pundito Khambo-Lama (The Learned High Priest). This confirmed Buddhism’s special position regarding Tibet and Mongolia, although spiritual authority of Tibetan Dalai Lamas has always been recognized by Buryat lamats and worshippers.

By the early 20th century, Buryatia had 47 monasteries and over 10,000 lamats. The major datsans were: Tsongoi, Gusi-noznoyzer (Tamchin), Aginsky, Anninsky, Atsagat, Egituy and Tsonog datsans.

Buddhism played an enormous role in the development of Buryat national tsarist society. Datsans hosted faculties that taught philosophy, logic, medicine, Tantra and so on; they printed religious, scholarly and popular didactic literature; they had workshops where painters, woodcutters, sculptors, scribes and many others worked.

As a result, Buddhist monasteries literally became the main spiritual and cultural centres of traditional Buryat society. The educational work of Buryat datsans is very well known: 29 of them had their own printing houses (or, rather, print shops), where woodblocks were used to manually print Buddhist works in Buryat and Mongolian languages, both for monks and for the lay public.

The latter half of the nineteenth century saw the rise of Buryat national school of sculpture and painting. Following the Tibetan canon, Buryat masters created outstanding works in...
The famous Shanti Stupa (Peace Pagoda) built atop the Rajgir hills, surrounded by a forest and accessed both by a ropeway and by foot—will mark its 50th anniversary later this month on 25 October 2019.

The temple was conceptualized and gifted by famous Buddhist philanthropist and monk Nichidatsu Fujii Guruji of Japan. It was inaugurated by the then President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. The site also includes a Nipponzan Myohoji temple.

It was the former Foreign Secretary, Mr Lalit Mansingh’s cousin the well-known artist Padmashri Upendra Maharathi, a Buddhist who migrated from Orissa to Bihar. He set up the Mahabodhi Society in India and subsequently with his spiritual Guru—Fujii Guruji whom he had met in Japan, he assisted in the identification of Raiger for the Shanti Stupa. Today, his daughter, Mahasweta Maharathi is taking a lead on the anniversary celebrations of the Shanti Stupa.

The importance of this hill is because of the Gridhakuta, or Vulture’s Peak (it is so named because the rocks on the hillside resemble a sitting vulture with its wings folded) where the Buddha is believed to have preached the Lotus Sutra. It was here that Gautama Buddha spent several months meditating and preaching. He also delivered some of his famous sermons and initiated king Bimbisara of Magadha and countless others to Buddhism.

Explaining the significance of the Peace Pagodas, Mr Mansingh said these were built as a symbol of peace in Japanese cities at the end of World War II, including Hiroshima and Nagasaki where the atomic bombs took the lives of over 150,000 people. By 2000, eighty Peace Pagodas had been built around the world in Europe, Asia, and the United States. A Peace Pagoda is a Buddhist stupa, it is designed to provide a focus for people towards peaceful co-existence of all races and creeds, and to help unite them in their search for world peace. Most (though not all) peace pagodas have been built under the guidance of Nichidatsu Fujii (1885–1965). Fujii was greatly inspired by his meeting with Mahatma Gandhi in 1931 and decided to devote his life to promoting non-violence. In 1947, he began constructing Peace Pagodas as shrines to world peace.

Original paintings by Padmashri Upendra Maharathi Shilp Anusandhan Sansthan has some of his priceless collections of art, documents, stone carvings, woodcraft, weaving, paintings and a host of other artifacts that testify to the ancient and rich heritage of Bihar.
The International Buddhist Confederation (IBC) is a Buddhist umbrella body that serves as a common platform for Buddhists worldwide. It currently has a membership comprising more than 300 organisations, both monastic and lay, in 39 countries.

Headquartered in New Delhi, the IBC is the outcome of the historic Global Buddhist Congregation held in November 2011 in New Delhi, wherein 900 delegates from all over the world, representing the entire Buddhist world, resolved to form an umbrella Buddhist world body based in India, the land of Buddha’s enlightened awakening and origins of Buddha dharma. The leadership of the IBC comprises the supreme religious Buddhist hierarchy of all traditions and countries as Patrons and members of our Supreme Dhamma Council.

As per its motto, “Collective Wisdom, United Voice”, the IBC provides a common platform to all followers of the Buddha Dharma worldwide to address issues that are of both Buddhist and global concerns.

Mission
To gather the collective wisdom of Buddhists around the world to speak with a united Buddhist voice; to make Buddhist values part of global engagement while working to preserve and promote Buddhist heritage, traditions and practices.