



## Hanamatsuri | A Report from Punatha, Bhutan

What baby's birth isn't magical? For the moment, a perfect human being, riding on an auspicious animal and showered with flower petals, it's every movement and sound received with a smile and parent's dreams of its perfection. An earthquake event forever changing one's schedule, lifestyle, values, and definitions of truth, beauty, and light. All the positive energies of a people focused in on a single baby; yours, mine and everyone's. Hanamatsuri is the enactment of a birth that took in every way – a world-honored one, a supremely awakened one. And we follow that path, sharing in the joy, humor, and good appetite. Happy birthday Siddhartha!

Buddhism is alive and well in Bhutan, at least for the moment. And if it dies out, it will not have been because the Bhutanese did not try their best to maintain their remarkable culture while moving into the global community. If it teeters and stumbles and regains its balance – Buddhism will have had a lot to do with it. If it ultimately succumbs to the love of things, of power, and control – I suspect it will be due to people like us who are here spending and buying – introducing an attitude and value system which will ultimately be their undoing. It is a bitter irony that the very thing we are attracted to here will be corroded by our presence. Our Senshinji pilgrimage tour was called the Butsu Butsu tour after our propensity to complain, complain, complain. Our Bhutanese tour guide asked what it meant, since in Bhutanese it means "little boy". I explained as best I could what "to complain" meant and asked him how to say it in Bhutanese. He nodded in understanding what "to complain" meant, but had trouble finding a Bhutanese word for it. He even consulted with the two other Bhutanese helpers on the bus, but they seemed equally hard pressed to find a Bhutanese word for it. If there is a word for "butsu butsu" in Bhutanese, it does not seem to be a very common word or event since I have yet to see any complaining except among our group and other tourists we encountered. In so many ways I cannot describe or even pinpoint – this is what it must be like to live in a deeply Buddhist flavored environment.

When Bhutan first opened its doors to the world in the 1970's it decided it needed a zoo, and proceeded to build one in the capital city of Thimpu. A few years later though, the then absolute monarch and the head of the monastic establishment met and decided that it was unseemly to have a zoo and promptly released all the animals. Of all the animals released, a few deer and a heard of Takin, the strange looking national animal – like a cross between a yak, horse and moose- kept returning to the abandoned zoo to feed. The government then felt obligated to supply feed whenever they visited. There are a hundred stories like this, some scientific and factual, some wildly fantastic – and they are all mixed together and shared in the most calm, contented, and unassuming manner. Even the dogs roaming about seem to move in contented slow motion. There was a singular absence of poverty of the body and spirit – if anything, the body and spirit seems to flourish here, quietly and dignified with no flourishes and fanfares, no in your face anything. The new constitutional monarchy and Buddhist Sangha has pledged itself to the "Gross National Happiness: of the country. What might seem "Pollyanna-ish" to us seems to be taken seriously but not somberly in Bhutan – and they are the better for it compared to all of our puffed-up posturing. In any case – Bhutan Kampai!

*Rev. Maa*