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Pirith at The Abode 2008

In June 2008 a 'Pirith', a Buddhist ritual, was held at The Abode, to bless the house and the Trust. A Pirith is a special ceremony in which "Sutras" are chanted loudly and ceremoniously in rhythm by both lay men and priests. The tradition of Pirith is thought to be ennobling and full of spiritual satisfaction. It has power to enrich life above the daily chores and promote believers to spiritual excellence by helping to lift their minds to something lofty and noble. The recital of Pirith in sonorous rhythm and unison by the saffron clad monks engenders deep emotion in the minds of the gathered for the ceremony.

Sid describes the Abode Pirith which was held all night and attended by about one hundred local people.....

"Everything looked remarkably white that evening. I arrived at around 4.00pm and the first thing that struck me was grandma dressed in an immaculate white jacket and cloth. She came to welcome us and I was given a tour of The Abode. The chanting was to take place in the front room and it was all white. White sheets adorned the ceiling with green leaves suspended on white cords. In the centre was a table to keep the books, spices and other sweets for the preachers. Lighted lamps and tappers filled the room and the corridor. The entrance was decorated with a pandol in a semi circle made out of tender coconut leaves. A few ferns too were fastened on the white wall at the side of the doorway. All chairs were draped in white cloth and the floor well carpeted.

Outside was strung a huge tent sheet as a shelter for the people invited. The kitchen was taken outside to a simply built hut out of corrugated sheets. Inside were three fire hearths to cook food and boil water.

All the men arrived clad in white shirts and sarongs by 5.30pm and were given tea initially and then dinner at half past seven. At the auspicious time of 8.10pm they all walked inside the preaching chamber in single file to start the Pirith. The high tone veneration echoed the night and each sentence was repeated one after the other till 12 midnight. Then out of ten men five sat to continue reading phrases from Pirith books whilst the rest took a break in the adjoining room.



At 5.30 in the morning the ceremony was concluded. The head of the house, grandpa, was given few drops of holy water from the pitcher and a white cord that extended from the chamber which was now blessed with Pirith. Then breakfast was offered to the men and gifts were handed over to each of them. Vije was the master of ceremony. He thanked all those who gathered and the ones who are connected in spirit.

By all accounts the Pirith was a success. I gather close to 100 people came to The Abode that night and everyone had a good time, were well fed and looked after. The support was immense and every detail looked after to make everything possible.”

Why have a Pirith?

The question why Pirith is sung is often asked and it is a rather difficult question to answer. The sound waves we can hear are limited by our abilities and nature but we know there are sounds which we cannot hear. These sound waves which reach our ears are rich enough to move the ocean of air around us and so it is that these movements of air and the sounds that this brings has the power to affect our minds, senses and thoughts. The sound waves and sounds have mysterious good effects to listeners of Pirith. Devotees believe chanting ‘Pirith’ will make evil spirits leave places or be made to treat us kindly. It is an age old belief that Chanting of Pirith will soothe both our body and mind.

Sue says: “I can confirm the mysterious effects of Pirith. Though I was not able to be at the ceremony in June, I was at The Abode during the Buddhist New Year in April 2008 when a spontaneous ‘Pirith’ began. We were all sat in the kitchen on the mud floor, watching the flames in the fire after a good meal of rice, when one of the men, the grandson of the house who is training to be a Buddhist monk, started to chant. Softly, at first, almost to himself, a sound like plain song began, which was picked up in turn by each of the men so it reverberated off the walls and reached through the open doorway to the night skies.

The chant rose and fell in waves as first one man paused and another picked up the words so that the sound filled the air, the vibrations tingled your skin and the harmony was unbelievable. I have no idea how long it continued, as I was entirely caught up in the sense of being there. I am not even sure when it stopped as it died and re created so many times and the silence which followed was as rich as the singing. But afterwards, I do know everything felt different.”

Some facts

Pirith chanting is a set of protective chants or rules sanctioned by the Buddha for the use of both laymen and bhikkhus. Pirith is regarded to have the capability to wipe out all forms of evil and bad luck, diseases and evil spirits to name a few. ‘Pirith’ or ‘Paritta’ - the word itself means the term ‘Protection’. Furthermore, pirith is chanted in the hope of obtaining blessings of the ‘Dhamma’ – the sacred words of Lord Buddha.



During a Pirith, a pot of clean water is also placed in the centre of the table inside the pavilion. One end of a ball of three-stranded thread is twisted around the pot. The thread then passes through the hands of the reciting monks and is next held by the person or the persons on whose behalf the chanting is being done and with every one present at the chanting. The water in the pot (pirith-pan), and the sacred thread (pirith-nula), become sacred through the chanting and are used thereafter as a protection against evil. The thread is used by tying a piece around the arm or the wrist and the water by drinking it or sprinkling it accordingly.



Pirith chanting can vary according to the time of the chanting. A monk chanting the thun sutta in three sessions (thun varuwa) is called varu-pirihta. More than one monk chanting throughout the night is known as the Sarwa Rathika Pirith. A Pirith ceremony continuing through out seven days is a Sathi Piritha. At least twelve monks should attend a Sathi Piritha.

Usually the chanting of Pirith is started in the evening. The person who is going to hold Pirith ceremony has to invite the chanters. The chanters will come and the lamps of the enclosure will be lighted, drums are beaten, incense will be burnt and the aims of chanting Pirith will be declared by Pali Stanzas, such as "Vipaththi Patibahaya Sbbha Sampaththi Siddiya" – which means, ' The Pirith will be chanted to avoid evils to heal all sufferings and to achieve all wealth.'



The members who chant Pirith will sit around the table and their hands are cleaned with special liquid made out of sandalwood paste, milk, and water. They instruct the audience, who have also cleaned their hands with the special mixture, to observe pansil or five precepts of Buddhism and worship triple gems. After this the god's will be invited and the Pirith will be begin. At first the worshipping stanzas of triple gems "Patichcha Samuppadaya Jayamangala Gatha" will be chanted. After it the cord which comes out of the water pot on the table will be extended to all preachers and listeners. The cords will be passed through loops which have been made of young coconut leaves and which are hanging on the four corners of the enclosure with each loop knotted. At the end of the Pirith these knots will be loosened. The water in the pot which has been on the table of the enclosure will be served to all and the cord Pirith.