(3) Fruit
(4) Count-rebil
(7) Vermilion
(8) Murard
Notes & Topics

SABDA & RUPA

Every religion has an element of symbolism. Dharma, Mahayana or Chhand is not an exception. Word or sound and mark or portrayal are characteristic expressions.

We often receive enquiries about hymns and prayers and symbols and images. Material in answer to such queries will be presented in the pages of this Bulletin.

Tsong-kha-pa’s Song of Spiritual Experience, original text with Tshangma’s English rendering, is the first item in this issue. A note on the Eight Auspicious Objects is the concluding item.

NCS

EIGHT AUSPICIOUS OBJECTS

Tashi (Skt. Marga or Satta) is explained in Maha Mangala Sutra (1) and also in Menga Nagaram (2). Both the books define the word Tashi in four and other ways. Nagarjuna (3) in Sunti-bhdha (4) expanded this further and said that one can gain salvation by these ways (3).

It is also said that one who knows the Dharma (5) and practises it, gains the luck for this world and as well as in the other world. In this connection Jampal Shenpen (6) explains thus: to understand the Dharma is accumulation of learning (7) and the good fortune is accumulation of moral merits (8).
Because the Buddha had blessed (4) the eight objects in order to bestow good fortune or happiness on the living beings these objects came to be known as Eight Auspicious Objects. In Tibetan tradition these objects are displayed after a consecration or installation ceremony to bestow good fortune or happiness on all living beings. The eight objects can be explained in two ways: legendary and symbolic.

LEGENDARY

One can find in the pages of Lalitavistara that some of these objects were offered to Gautama the Buddha on different occasions. There is controversy about the gods and people offering these objects. The scholars of Saky and Gehog were almost agreed on the following offerings.

1. Mirror —The light holding goddess offered the mirror to the Buddha and He rendered it holy.

2. Intestinal concretion —Found in the entrails of certain animals and in the neck of an elephant—The land guarding elephant offered it to the Buddha and He blessed it as a holy medicine.

3. Cured daughter —Daughter of farmer offered it to the Buddha and He blessed it as a food free from impurity (sin).

4. Darwa grass —The Buddha was offered this holy grass by the grass seller, Mangalan. This was blessed by the Buddha as symbolic of long life. It is also said that Gautama attained Enlightenment sitting on this grass, under the Bodhi tree.

5. Fruits —wood apple—Brahma offered it to the Buddha and He blessed it to be the best fruit.
6. White conch shell (རྣོན་པོ་) — Indra (ཐོབ་ཕྲེང་) offered it to the Buddha after His Enlightenment, when he begged him to turn the Wheel of Law (ལོ་མོག་/ རྩོམ་འབྲོ་བོད་རྣམ་) The Buddha blessed it and blew it before he preached the First Sermon. It is symbol of propagation as well as the lama of doctrine “རྣལ་ཙློང་ཁྲི་ལོ་མོག་” (6).

7. Vermilion (ཉི་བོ་) — The Brahman Kanyali (སྤྲུལ་བལྟོས་) offered it to the Buddha and on Buddha’s blessing vermilion became the mark of overpowering knowledge.

8. White mustard (ཉི་ལོག་) — Vajrapani (ལྷོ་གཞན་) offered it to the Buddha and which was blessed as a demon defeating tower.

In Runchen Trisal (རི་ཙྲི་མན་) one finds that the Brahman Kundali (སྤྲུལ་མཁན་) offered the grass (No. 4), goddess of tree (ཛེས་ལྔ་) offered the fruit (No. 5) and mother of earth (ཉི་བོ་) offered the vermilion (No. 7) to the Jina i.e. the Buddha.

SYMBOLIC

The Eight Auspicious Objects symbolise the Noble Eightfold Path (གྲུབ་སྤྲོག་སྔོན་པོ་/ ཁྲུང་བོད་ལོ་རྒྱལ་མ་) laid down by the Buddha.

The Noble Eightfold Path consists of—

1. Right Thought (བདག་བོད་/ རབས་ཆོས་བདག་བོད་)
2. Right Mindfulness (བདག་ལམ་/ རབས་ལམ་ལམ་)
3. Right Livelihood (བདག་གས་/ རབས་གས་ངོ་)
4. Right Effort (བདག་ལོ་/ རབས་ལོ་ལོ་)
5. Right Action (सत्यप्रयोग / अनुमोदनम् / बलम्)

6. Right Speech (सत्यवचन / बलवचन / अधिकारम्)

7. Right Meditation (सत्यमन्तर / अधिकारमन्तर / बलमन्तर)

8. Right View (सत्यस्वेच्छ / अनुभवम् / अधिकारस्वेच्छ)

Right Thought is the correct understanding of the doctrine and the thought which gives rise to exposition of the doctrine (8). The mirror symbolises the Right Thought as it holds the right reflection without change.

The great philosopher, Santi Deva (शति देव) explains the Right Mindfulness as meditation on Right Mindfulness which protects one from ignorance and impurity and suffering (9). Givang represents the Right Mindfulness being a medicine, which cures the ailment and keeps one's mind free.

Cord symbolises the Right Livelihood as it is a food free from any impurity (sin).

Vasudeva's (वसुदेव) commentary on Sutrakanda / सुत्राकान्द (10) describes the Right Effort as the practice of Dharma for Life Eternal without any difficulty or harm. As we shall see below the symbolic meaning of the grass is longevity.

Right Action is forsaking the sin and adhering to the virtue (11). Fruit symbolises success in such action.

White conch-shell stands for Right Speech as it produces a melodious sound which can put down other sounds. Right Speech is always free from any faulty statement or evil words.

Veena represents the Right Meditation. The great reformer Tsongkhapa (त्सोंक्हाप) explains that by Right Meditation one can gain the highest power (11).

White mustard symbolises the Right View. It subdues the evil spirits as the Right View can defeat the wrong views.

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Symbiosis of these eight objects can be read from the point of benefit. Thus eight auspicious objects symbolise benefit either to self (अत्यान्तघर्षणिः भूपतिः) or to others (प्रभाकरधारीस्य) The mirror represents the self and the rest symbolise the others.

Mirror, as one can see one's own reflection in the mirror, the Buddha knew all the things without having any doubt when He had the vision, that is the Bodhi (Knowledge). In this way mirror symbolises the self benefit.

The Buddha's kind deeds that is deeds for others' benefit can be in four ways: quiet (शांतिः), abundant (वख्यात), power (लक्ष्यते) and terrific (प्रभावते).

Generally the quiet service can be performed in two kinds, relief from illness and ignorance.

Intestinal concretion stands as relief from illness as itself is a medicine and as we have seen above as the best medicine which was blessed by the Buddha.

Curd symbolises relief from suffering due to ignorance. According to Uttaradhyayana the essence of the Bodhi is in the ten stages of perfection of a Bodhisattva "हृदयाणि भूद्वं भूपतिः सिद्धिः सिद्धिः सिद्धिः सिद्धिः सिद्धिः सिद्धिः (1.1). In this way curd symbolises the essence of Bodhi; the curd being made from milk which contains the essence of all graces "हृदयाणि भूद्वं भूपतिः सिद्धिः सिद्धिः (4).

Abundant service may be in three ways: life (भूपतिः), happiness (अस्तित्वसन्धिः) and doctrine (धर्मस्य).

Grass represents long life; in Kunchog Tendron's (सुविन्याधिकारी) works one finds the name of this grass as Chikah (सुविन्याधिकारी).
(14) which means hard to die. Sometimes the name of the grass is Tibe-phal-drez (ཐིབ་པ་ཕལ་དྲེན་) (16) or the object of long life.

Fruit symbolises the abundant happiness. In Lāhāntsaṅh it reads as "ཨྭཟྭཨྭ་སྤྲོ་ནས་ཕྱི་ལྷ་ཨྭཨྭ་རྣོ་ལྟངས་" (17), that is, a virtuous person will succeed. The fruit has the name as Seiphal སེིཕལ་ (18) and the the word Siri (སྲིད་) is good for virtue as well as success; Siri also means Siddha སིད་པ་ (19).

White conch-shell symbolises the hearing of the doctrine. To understand the doctrine one must hear first and in this way the hearing is important as it is said in Umapatrita "གུལ་བོ་་ཞིང་། ཟིང་། དེ་དང་། བོ་ནས་ཆོི་" (20). Besides the sound of the conch-shell can drown the other sounds, stands for preaching of Sermon which can subdue the sound of non-religion.

The power service is rendered by vermillion. Vermilion represents the power of the knowledge. The Sanskrit word Sinduram (सिंधुरम्) has lost its correct pronunciation and became Siddurā (སི་དྲུ།) or Sedura (སིད་དྲུ།) in Tibetan (21). It has a name as red sand ཕྱིི རྟོ་བོ་ དུ་ (23) and the red colour itself stands for power when the four services are symbolised by the colours "ཀྱིི རྟོ་བོ་ དུ་ བོ་ མེ་ ཁྱིི · བོ་ ཆ་ ཡིི བོ རོ་ " (21).

The terrific service is that of the white mustard. The white mustard symbolises force. The other name of mustards Kadampah, ཀྲ་དྲི་མཁན་ (24), means conquest or suppression of evil. The white mustard is also known as Siddha (25). It is significantly the last in the display of the Eight Auspicious Objects. It guarantees the success of the seven previous offerings as well.
BENEDICTION

At the conclusion of the ceremony the head priest greets as follows:

May mirror purify defilements in your thought.
May concretion end your misery.
May curb quieten the three poisons (i.e. lust, hatred and ignorance)
May grass prolong your life.
May fruit fulfill your desires.
May white conch-shell spread your reputation.
May vermilion make your dominion firm.
May white mustard subdue your enemies (16).

NOTES

2. Tenjor, བ་ལ་བར་བརྱི་བསྡུག; Vol. སེ: p. 337.
3. Tenjor, བ་ལ་བར་བརྱི་བསྡུག; Vol. སེ: p. 43.
5. Same as under note No.4.
9. Tenjor, བ་ལ་བར་བརྱི་བསྡུག; Vol. སེ: p.11.
10. Terjor, བ་ལ་བར་བརྱི་བསྡུག; Vol. སེ: p.218.
21. S.C. DAS: Tibetan-English Dictionary p. 1269, the word reads as "Sidurra" and in त्सोंघ्कुपा का कार्य (Lhasa edition) p. 14, reads as "Soluma".
26. Same as under note No. 4.

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