

An invitation to Romania

By

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On the occasion of Wesak day from this year my thoughts are sent not only to those people who can hear the Dharma and practice it in all the conditions, not only to the monks and the large communities from Asia or America, but especially to those beings who cannot meet the Dharma, to those that have never seen a monk in their life, or have never heard a sutra or the name of a Buddha, to those who wish to practice the Dharma but do not have the conditions in which to meet with it. There are people in my country that consider themselves to be Buddhists, but they haven't received the Three Refuges from a monk, instead they took them in their own room in the middle of a Christian family and relatives that look to them as something strange. There are people who will never afford to travel in such remote places such as Thailand or even Europe, but they wish to follow the Way of the Buddha and receive the teaching. I am the voice of these friends of mine who put their trust in me that I will come to this Wesak Conference and do my best in order to convince Theravada monks and other Buddhist monks from various traditions to come to Romania and spread the teaching of the Lord Buddha. I am the voice of my Dharma friends, seen or unseen yet, who have met the Dharma or who will meet with it in the future and who couldn't attend this meeting. I am speaking now in front of you about them and ask you, please do your best and come to Romania, send delegations of Theravada and Mahayana monks and begin Buddhist activities there. We, the Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Association from Romania, to which I am the representative, will do everything that stands in its power to help every authentic Buddhist tradition that comes to our country to spread the Dharma. These are not just simple words but our way of action and our past and recent activities proves this.

Although Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Association from Romania (Asociatia Buddhista Jodo Shinshu din Romania) is a Japanese Pure Land tradition, we have never thought that we are the only authentic school of Buddhism. In accordance with the instructions given to us by Shinran Shonin(1173-1262) the founder of our tradition, and Rennyo Shonin (the Restorer) we deeply believe that there are 84 thousand Dharma gates or 84 thousand good methods (upaya) preached by the Buddha in order to benefit various types of beings in accordance with their level of understanding. There is no bad Dharma method, no Buddhist practice about one can say that is of no use. The beauty of Buddhism stands also in its variety and openness. The various methods that Buddhism teaches through its various schools is a proof of its wisdom, authenticity and compassion. Wisdom, because like a good doctor, it has many wonderful medicine to cure the disease of mankind according to the various types of patients; authenticity because its many manifestations proves its living force, that is, only a dead body cannot move and remains unchanged, but Buddhism, on the contrary, proved that it is a universal remedy for people of so many countries with different cultural background or level of understanding; and compassion, because the only reason of the appearance of the Buddha in the world is to bring all people to Supreme Enlightenment, no

matter they are monks or lay, good or bad, attached or unattached by the many things of the world. It is a mistake to think that Buddhism is only for the virtuous monks or nuns or for people who are capable to live in a monastery or for any other kind of spiritual elite.

All the methods given by the Buddha, whether they are recorded in the Theravada or Mahayana canon, or in the tantras, are the compassionate advice of a mother who knows all it is best for her children, while being aware of their different personalities.

The only reason why we need Buddhism is because we are sick. I am sick, a monk is sick, a lay is sick, a man, a woman, a king or queen, everybody. We are all sick with the sickness of ignorance, greed, anger, and we must realize how fortunate we are to have the wonderful possibility of treating us with one of the many kinds of medicine given by the Buddha. The multiplicity of Buddhism is a great chance for this sick world, and not an obstacle. I think this is the true spirit in which to find methods for disseminating the Dharma, the theme of this workshop which I think is very much related with the other one called "Buddhist Collaboration". This is because we cannot disseminate the Dharma in countries where there is no Dharma or little Dharma, like Romania, without a good collaboration between all Buddhist schools and Buddhist teachers and without the profound understanding that we are not at all in competition and rivalry.

There must be no place in the dissemination of Buddhism for words such as these two. It is very important not to let the ego and sectarian egocentrism to stand between the Dharma and the people who need it, but to let the Dharma flow in its natural course, to express itself in its all potentialities and be tasted by people with different types of past karma and past affinities.

Our Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Association from Romania was founded in October 2002 and our centre from Craiova, called Tariki Dojo, in May 2004. Although it is primarily a Jodo Shinshu (Pure Land) center, it has also a non-sectarian (rime) orientation. Even from its founding, we have offered free space for practice to the Zen group in our town, who do not yet have a place of practice of their own.

At our centre we have a Buddhist library with books about Jodo Shinshu but also about other Buddhist traditions. This library, called Dhamma Vihara, is the first Buddhist library in the country and was created earlier before founding the centre. Readers from all over Romania can borrow freely the books they want. We are also sending Dharma gifts to people from all over the country by mail. Every Buddhist book is welcomed and people are encouraged to read, learn and respect every manifestation of the Buddha's teaching. International Association of Buddhist Culture from Japan, the Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, Taiwan or Foundation for the Preservation of Mahayana Buddhism are only few names of organisations that supports us with books and to which we express our gratitude. There are some translations of Buddhist books in Romanian and its number is increasing, especially from Zen and Tibetan Buddhism.

Theravada and Pure Land related texts are at the beginning and the translation work is (most of the translations, if not all, are from English) made by devoted Buddhists from all walks of life, the majority of whom learned English by

their own efforts. We are now some translators who are working together in the first Romanian Translation Group, established as a method of helping each other in the hard and dangerous realm of translations. There is no academic study of Buddhism, no Universities, no institutes, small or large, nothing like other countries in Asia or even Europe have, just some enthusiastic persons and small communities who try their best to live and share with others the gift of Dharma.

Buddhism is a newly appeared religion in Romania, after the anticommunist revolution in 1989, and is now starting to be a little more felt in the local religious picture. There are three other Buddhist groups, except Jodo Shinshu, which are spread in different towns: two Tibetans and Soto Zen, Taisen Deshimaru line. We collaborate and bound friendship with Zen and Gelugpa school. In Craiova the collaboration with Zen sangha has embraced many forms like spreading posters together, sharing the same place of practice, reciprocal publicity, team working as well as mutual support in all problems that may appear. The collaboration between the two traditions is very strong in my town, we are like two brothers having the same mother (Shakyamuni Buddha's teaching) but who are different and will remain different, so it's out of the question that the two practices and teachings might be intermingled.

This year, Tariki Dojo Craiova is organizing the first celebration of the day of Wesak in Romania between 13th - 14th of May, so I will leave Thailand on 11th in order to arrive in due time at our centre to lead the ceremonies of the first Romanian Wesak. The idea of organizing this event occurred to me during the last Wesak meeting in Thailand and soon after I arrived home I started to share it with other Romanian Buddhists who accepted with joy.

These are some examples of our efforts for the dissemination of Buddhism in Romania, done in a non-sectarian way and in this spirit I would like to extend an invitation to Buddhist monks, both from Theravada and Mahayana schools, to come to Romania and help in the spreading of the Dharma in all its various forms.

I am sending a special invitation to Theravada Buddhist monks, because Theravada Buddhism is not yet established in Romania, that is, not a single Theravada monk is preaching there, although there are people I know that are willing to enter through this Dharma gate and are ready to practice under the guidance of a good teacher. This is not a simple invitation made because I have nothing better to do, but it is the very reason why I am here, why I attend this Conference. It is my mission here.

If, until the end of this Conference, I will not receive, for example, any firm promise from a Theravada Buddhist teacher that he will come to Romania to establish this Dharma gate, then I will consider that I came to Thailand for nothing. The people I know in Romania and who consider themselves to be Theravada Buddhists, although they have never met a Theravada monk in their life, would be very much disappointed and I myself would be very sad if a monk or group of monks will not begin Buddhist activities in our country. I received some promises in the past but none of them were kept and now my country is lacking one of the most important form of Buddhism, one who can help many people who resonate with this kind of Dharma method.

Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Association from Romania is willing to help any Buddhist school and teacher that wish to help the spreading of Dharma in our part of the world. The details of a first visit can be discussed with me during these Wesak days.

It is my great hope that the voice of the people in the name I speak will be heard and my coming here will be fruitful. It is the gift I wish for my country on this day of Wesak. Venerable monks and nuns from all Buddhist traditions, please help me fulfil this aspiration and bring the torch of the Dharma in my country.

Namo Buddha,
Josho Adrian Cirlea