

SWAMI MAZZINIANANDA AND THE UDANA KARANA BUDDHIST TEMPLE IN SANTA CRUZ

By Paul Tutwiler, Pacific Grove, California, 2011

“A man who called himself Swami Mazzanandi conducted a Buddhist Church in the Farmers' Union Hall. He was a cockney Englishman and would read the Gospel of Buddha from one side of the altar and the Epistle of Buddha from the other. He gained many followers.”

This information appeared in the well-known roving reporter Ernest Otto's posthumous “Old Santa Cruz” column in the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* of September 25, 1955. In reading this particular column about early Santa Cruz churches, Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, and the like, one is startled to find a Buddhist congregation led by a “cockney Englishman.” A reporter in Santa Cruz from 1885 to 1955, Otto had been personally acquainted with these churches, but how accurate were his reminiscences? Where did “Mazzanandi,” a person unusual even for Santa Cruz, come from, and what happened to his Buddhist church, which exists no longer?

The organizer

Swami Mazziniananda was indeed a flamboyant California religious organizer. The earliest information I have of him is from 1905, when he initiated 20 people into the Udana Karana Sangha Buddhist Brotherhood in Los Angeles.(1) In 1907 the San Francisco Buddhist journal *Light of Dharma* published his article, “Reincarnation: a necessity.” (2)

He established the Udana Karana Temple of Harmonial Philosophy in Santa Cruz in 1908, (3) and three years later he filed formal incorporation papers in California for the “Udana Karana Order of Buddhists and Jain Philosophy.” (4) Although “Udana Karana” is a term in the Buddhist tradition, the employment of the term “Harmonial Philosophy” in the United States seems to be appropriated from the use established for it in the 1850s by Andrew Jackson Davis, the theoretician of Spiritualism, and not a Buddhist. (5)

The dedication of the Santa Cruz Temple took place December 6, 1908 in a ceremony featuring Mazziniananda himself and three Japanese Buddhist priests, including the minister of the Watsonville Buddhist Temple. (6) Farmers' Union Hall, located at the Southeast corner of Pacific and Soquel Avenues, was the original location of the Santa Cruz temple, but by October, 1909 the congregation met in Carpenters' Hall in the Neary Building on Pacific Avenue, about a block north of Farmer's Union Hall. (7) After

December, 1909 the Udana Karana Temple was no longer listed at all in the church directories of either the *Santa Cruz Surf* or the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*. The Watsonville *Evening Pajaronian* of January 11, 1911, however, announced that Mazziniananda would give a talk on the "Symbols of Masonry and its Origin" in the Watsonville Buddhist Temple. This date in early 1911 is the latest I have found for the Swami in Santa Cruz County.

Definitely not Asian, as is evident from the photo which accompanied the report of initiations in 1905, (See

<http://www.santacruzspirituality.net/mazzinianandaphoto.png>.)

Mazziniananda was nevertheless known to Buddhist leaders in India. The October, 1909 issue of the Ceylonese Buddhist publication *Maha-Bodhi* printed a July 12 letter from him to his friend in Ceylon, the publisher of the *Maha-Bodhi*, the well-known Anagarika Dharmapala. A passage in the letter makes us think that Mazziniananda had been in Ceylon and perhaps had met Dharmapala there. However that may be, Dharmapala, in the course of three missionary tours to California, visited Santa Cruz, a fact recorded in the Ernest Otto column cited above. Otto, while noting that "Daramapala" was a Buddhist, asserted that the Santa Cruz Theosophists sponsored his visit, as they did for the Theosophists Helena Blavatsky and Catherine Tingley. In the letter to Dharmapala Mazziniananda wrote that he had a new location, 82 Walnut Avenue, and that his place of worship was a "temple," whereas the Buddhists of Watsonville had only a "mission." He added that he had been traveling from one Buddhist location to another in California since May, and was disappointed that Japanese Buddhists were not willing to hold services in English. Mazziniananda professed to be deeply offended by the general prejudice and ignorance he found in Santa Cruz, where Spiritualism, he wrote, was strong, and by the hostility shown to him by the local Theosophists. He noted that the leading local newspaper, the *Sentinel*, was in his favor and he seemed to be saying that it printed reports of his sermons. The letter also contained a brief description of the order of services in the Udana Karana Temple.(8)

A second, and final, article by Mazziniananda in the *Maha-Bodhi* appeared in the March, 1910 issue. The text of a sermon he had preached in San Francisco, this article is one of two examples I have of his intellectual and literary abilities during his Santa Cruz period. In it he presented the Buddhist (and Hindu) notions of the relation between the self, the non-self, and the Absolute, emphasizing the positive value of the losing of the self. (9) The sermon is an exhortation to selfless living rather than an explanation of what that means. It is clearly meant for believers; to others its thoughts are apt to be obscure.

The other example of the Swami's abilities as a writer occurs as a defense of Buddhism printed in the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*. The December 4, 1908 *Sentinel* reported that he had claimed that "No Buddhist had ever become a Christian," and it took him to task for this statement, refuting it with an article from the *Christian Herald*. The next day the *Sentinel*, published an article, "Fight for Buddhism; Fight against Buddhism," headed by the statement, "We herewith print both sides of the question, believing that this is the only fair way of treating the subject." "Why Buddhism must fail here" was by an "unknown contributor," and "Why Buddhism will grow here" was by "Very Rev. Svami Mazziniananda." The unknown contributor's submission was biased diatribe which demonstrated the author's ignorance more than anything else. The Right Reverend's statement, on the contrary, was a factual and logical assessment of Buddhism, mixed, however, with bitterness against Christianity. It also contained the curious statement that "I might here say Buddhism and Masonry are almost identical, and as long as Masonry lasts, Buddhism will continue spreading. Their teachings are identical, inculcating a spirit of charity, tolerance, and universal brotherhood."

The showman

Ritual and drama were salient features of Mazziniananda's Buddhism. In 1911 the publisher of the American journal *The Open Court*, Paul Carus, had written and published *Buddhist Hymns*, in which he cited Mazziniananda as an expert on the topic. (10) The Swami's "Order of the Buddhist High Mass" was published in the January, 1912 issue of *The Open Court*. The article states that the ceremonies described in it were adapted (by whom?) for American Buddhists from those used by the Dalai Lama in Tibet. The celebrant of the high mass, a Bishop, assisted by at least two priests, goes in an entrance procession to to a sanctuary and opens a tabernacle which contains an image of Buddha or Amitabha. Then, in the body of the ceremony, the Bishop recites or chants (music included with the text) various texts of invocation or adoration. Eventually he reads an Epistle, that is, an excerpt from Buddhist scripture, has a Gospel (from Paul Carus's *The Gospel of Buddha*?) read, makes church announcements, and delivers a sermon. At the end he elevates the collection bowl toward the altar, turns, and with his hand makes the sign of the swastika over the congregation. In the course of the ritual the gong is struck many times, and the celebrant uses incense and sprinkles himself and the altar with salt water. (11)

The showman side of Mazziniananda can also be seen in the photo which accompanies the 1905 *Los Angeles Herald* article cited above. With his turban, long robes, and sash, the man in the photo looks like an Irishman posing as Lawrence of Arabia or the Great Carnap or even Liberace. He

further enhanced his image by his titles and degrees, the full list of which is PASTOR, REV. SRI BISHOP MAZZINIANANDA MAHA THEKO, M.A., M.D., PH.D., D.SCI. LIT. (12) The sources cited in the present article refer variously to him as the “Lord Abbott of the Jain Order,” “E. Leodi Ahmed Mazziniananda, bishop of the American Buddhist Church of Dharma,” and “Bishop Sri Mazziniananda, head of the Church of Universal Truth.” The two Santa Cruz newspapers consistently called him “Very Rev. Svami Mazziniananda.” When he wrote to Dharmapala he signed as “Very Rev. Swami Mazziniananda, Jain Bikkhu.”

The man beneath the organizer and the showman

It is beyond the scope of the present study to question Mazziniananda’s claim to have so many degrees or to ask where he acquired them. As to his religious attributes, however, it is fair to observe in them elements of Spiritualism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Jainism, as well as Buddhism. There is, as mentioned above, the use of the name “Harmonial Philosophy,” which is at least reminiscent of Andrew Jackson Davis’s Spiritualism. Then, calling himself a Bishop and using the terms “High Mass” and “Vespers” appears to be inspired by Christianity, particularly Catholicism; calling himself a Sri and a Swami, by Hinduism. In his fusing of Jainism with Buddhism, describing himself as a Jain “Bikkhu” (monk), he can point to many similarities between the two offshoots of Hinduism, but he is confusing the issue by omitting their differences. (13) It is also a fact that the American public of 1910 had only the vaguest notion of what Buddhism was and how it differed from Hinduism, Jainism, and Theosophy, and so was not in a position to question the Swami’s authenticity. (14)

Mazziniananda later lived in Oakland, California, where he was “Bishop, head of the Church of Universal Truth.” He is recorded to have claimed that he was over 100 years old, the oldest living Buddhist priest. Before dying, in 1930 or 1931, he told about his voyage to Mars, where his Martian guide explained to him that there were 13,600,000,000 Martians and that the canals were dug long ago as a monumental water distribution system. (15)

For anyone who wishes to make a serious study of this unusual man, the sources of this article, found in the notes, furnish a wealth of leads. It is probably not difficult to trace the course of his years in Oakland, but the facts about his early Buddhist – and other - connections would be harder to find. One can only hope that where he came from and how he created himself can be uncovered.

NOTES

1. *Los Angeles Herald*, Oct. 20, 1905.
2. *Light of Dharma*, Vol. 6, No. 3. Pp. 3-8. I have not seen the article, which I found listed in Books-Google under *Orientalische Bibliographie*, Volume 21.
3. *Santa Cruz Surf*, Dec. 7, 1908.
4. www.california.14thstory.com [2011].
5. Davis introduced the term Harmonial Philosophy in the fifth book of his five volume work, *The Great Harmonia*, published in 1850-1855. Even now there is a Harmonial Philosophy Association of Spiritualists; its website is www.hpaonline.net.
6. *Santa Cruz Surf*, Dec. 7, 1908.
7. *Santa Cruz Surf*, Oct. 16, 1909.
8. *Maha-Bodhi and the United Buddhist World*, Colombo, Ceylon, Vol. XVII, No. 10, October, 1909, pp. 259-262.
9. *Maha-Bodhi and the United Buddhist World* Vol. XVIII, No. 3, March, 1910, pp. 402-404.
10. Paul Carus, *Buddhist Hymns*, Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1911, pp. 9-10. The German-born Carus was one of the most influential American exponents of Buddhism in his day, although he called himself a Rationalist. His book *Amitabha*, (Chicago: Open Court, 1906) was an endeavor to explain Buddhist theology through a narrative, in which the young Buddhist monk Charaka discovers the essential truths of Buddhism. A copy of *Amitabha* in which "Right Rev. Svami Maziniananda" has written his name on the front end paper is in the possession of the scholar of Buddhism, Todd Perreira. For an evaluation of Paul Carus and his influence see Thomas Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism 1844-1912*, University of North Carolina Press, 2000, pp. 65-67.
11. "Order of the Buddhist High Mass." *The Open Court*, January, 1912, Vol. 26, No. 1, p. 71-84. The latter half of the article describes the Buddhist Vespers ceremonies, which closely resemble those of the High Mass.
12. *Oakland Tribune* "around 1930" cited in <http://tibetologic.blogspot.com> [2011], which is maintained by "Dan."
13. Both dating back to around five hundred BC, Buddhism emphasized attitude over ceremony, and Jainism was characterized by asceticism.
14. Professors in Tuebingen, Germany knew more about Buddhism. Late in 1912, *The Open Court* (Vol. 26, p. 253) printed a letter from Prof. Richard Garbe of Tuebingen, who complained that "The texts employed in this mass are Buddhist only to a small extent. For the most part they are composed of verses and quotations out of the ancient Vedic literature, although to be sure

in a distorted form and with astonishingly free translations, some of which have no connection with those passages....

”If we have here a copy of a high mass as it is performed in Lhasa, we see that the unsophisticated Tibetan monks have collected a number of old Brahman sayings which they understood no better than they understood the Buddhist Pali texts.”

16. From <http://danielfry.com> 2011, which quotes Fry's article in his publication, *Understanding*, of May, 1967, Vol 12 No 5.

Thanks to Santa Cruzan Phil Reader for giving me local newspaper articles which made me aware of the presence of Mazziniananda in Santa Cruz and to Todd Perreira of San Jose State University for alerting me to the *Maha-Bodhi* articles, which led me to a wider view of the Swami.