

Background: The name of the valley Ura is a degenerated term” Ura Bay” meaning “the hidden valley of Orgen Gru Rinpoche fenced by the mountains.” As the name implies the valley is considered a “Baeyul” and is considered as special valley blessed by the Saint Like, Guru Rinpoche and Longchen Rabjampa, the patron saint of Nyingmapa order, Wangchuk Nima Yoezer one the sons of the Drukpa saint of Phajo Drugom Shigpo and Nyoton Thruelshing of the noble Nyo clan. Thus, it is a valley with a rich social, cultural and religious history.

Festival: As we now know that it is a valley blessed by Guru Rinpoche, the following legendary tradition reveals the sacred connection of the valley and it’s people with Guru Rinpoche.

Origination of the festival

It is said that the village of Ura was infested by leprosy, which threatened the entire village of Ura to extinction. One winter, an old women was spinning threads from sheep wool in her garden as it is customary of the Ura community that women generally work with sheep yarn in their wind shaded garden during winter time.

A wondering mendicant came begging for alms. The old women wanted to serve a hot tea thinking that the mendicant must be tired and thirsty. On her return to the garden with hot tea and alms, the mendicant had disappeared leaving a strange statue behind in her basket of the wool. On seeing it, the old women was excited as well as terrified as she was not sure if it is a good or bad omen. So she immediately alerted the neighbors and the elderly villages who gathered together in astonishment. To their surprise, they ground no mendicant as described by the old lady to be seen either coming or leaving the village. So they decided to consult high Lamas of the times who identified the statue as the statue of Vajrapani” and the wondering mendicant as no lesser person then Guru Rinpoche himself who manifested himself in to human form to save the people of his hidden village. They then prophesied that the statue will not only serve as an anti dot against the evil forces and the Nagas (Sub terrain spirit) who are attributed to inflict leprosy and skin diseases, but also protect the well being of the village provided the statue is offered to the Lama residing above the hidden village.

So following the prophecy, they consulted the astrologers to prescribe an auspicious day to offer the statue to the prophesied Lama. Every year, on the 25th day of the 12th month of the Bhutanese Lunar Calendar, the incumbent Gaden Lama conducts an empowerment of Vajrapani at Gaden Monastery. This is the anniversary of the statue of Vajrapani, the sacred possessing of the Gaden Lamas. On that auspicious day, people of Ura gathered at Gaden and offered the Statue to the Lama, thus building a sacred religious bond between the Gaden Lamas and the people of Ura. The lama then conducted an empowerment ceremony of Vajrapani.

During the initiation part of the ceremony as the lama invoked the mandala of tutelary deity “Vajrapani” with retinues, a tremor was felt by all the people present and to their surprise all the lepers were miraculously cured and to everyone’s eye, a nine headed serpent went out opening a spring about half a kilometer below Gaden Monastery following the trail of Ura

chu. Then as time went by for the incident of divine wonder, the people felt incomplete even though the statue was sagely secured in the hands of the prophesied lama, so they decided to invite both the Lama and the tutelary deity (statue) to their village to make a special offering. They then decided to brew the best local wine as in earlier times, they could not brew any wines because it is against the naga spirits who will then inflict leprosy according to Buddhist belief.

To celebrate the triumph against the nagas and as a gratitude to the Lama and Tutelary deity, they made an excellent offering of wines both to the lama and the tutelary deity. The name “Yagchoe” means an excellent offering.

Controversial View:

Some people say that the festival is called as Yakchoe meaning yak offering as Ura’s local deity’s (Thinley Thaktse) mount is a black yak. Other say that it is a degenerated term for “Hakseo” which is a Bon Ritual still in practiced in the Ura Temple.

Events:

Day 1: Wine testing ceremony.

Day 2: invitation procession ceremony and the last rehearsal of the mask dances without the ceremonial costumes. At night, fire ceremony.

Day 3: Full swing festival.

Day 4: Full swing festival.

Day 5: Blessing Ceremony.