



PHOTOS BY ANDY MELNIC



‘Every time you go around these wonderful relics, you’re erasing negative karma, so why wouldn’t you want to do it?’

— **VENERABLE TENZIN PELBAR**
SARAH Nyingma BUDDHIST INSTITUTE

Blessing the Beasties

BUDDHIST RELIC TOUR GUIDES PETS ON THE PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT by Amy Schneider

When your pet is sick, you visit the vet, and when your pet needs exercise, you go to the park, but where do you go when your pet needs spiritual enrichment? A Buddhist temple, of course. On July 26, a collection of sacred Buddhist relics is coming to the Saraha Nyingma Buddhist Institute, and animals are encouraged to share in the karmic riches.

The Maitreya Heart Shrine Relic Tour is a collection of precious Buddhist relics that exudes positive energy and travels all over the world, seeking to benefit humans and animals alike by offering the opportunity to be blessed by the relics.

In the Buddhist tradition, animals are part of a continuum on the path to enlightenment. Animals work off their karmic debt until they can reincarnate as humans, granting them a form in which they can make their own choices and advance on their spiritual journey.

“Before animals see the relics, they’re eating their dog

chow and waiting for their owner to come home and going to the dog park, but afterwards, that same being is intentionally connected to Buddhist teachings,” says Michael Maretich, vice president and facility manager for Saraha, which follows the Dudjom Lineage of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism. “In this life or in a future life, it’s going to benefit that being.”

Venerable Tenzin Pelbar, a Buddhist nun at Saraha, says that when she was at Bodh Gaya in India, the monks there would take water buffalo and goats by their leads and run with them around ancient relics. “Every time you go around these wonderful relics, you’re erasing negative karma, so why wouldn’t you want to do it?” she says.

In the blessing ceremony, Pelbar and other ordained Buddhists will take the relics and place them on the forehead, shoulders or heart of whatever being they are blessing. She says for animals, she prays for their liberation to reincarnate as humans so that they can attain enlightenment, the ultimate goal.

The relics themselves are the remains of enlightened

Buddhist masters — some in the form of bone or hair, but most commonly in the form of “ringsel,” delicate, pearly beads left behind in the cremation process. Buddhists believe that ringsel embody the positive energy and teachings of the masters. Pelbar says that she has seen pets healed from physical injury and illness in the presence of the relics, but the most important change is of the spiritual kind.

“Whether you’re an ant, a dog or a human, there’s a cord that goes from your heart to the relic — not the physical relic, but to the teaching that it came from,” Pelbar says. “It’s like you wake up but you don’t even know it, which makes a huge difference in how you go about your daily life, regardless of what species you are.”

The entire event is free to attend, and people and animals of any kind are welcome to receive blessings, but remember to keep pets on a leash. The opening ceremony at Saraha is 6 to 7 pm July 26, with blessings from 7 to 8 pm. Blessings continue 10 am to 7 pm July 27 and 10 am to 5 pm July 28. 🐾

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