



On Peace as the Ground and Motivation

Comments on iconography
By Saraha Children's School

When a school with a spiritual basis is undertaken, much will be tested and many questions arise. One lesson we have learned from SCS is that it is useful to distill one's purpose and attain conviction as to what one is trying to accomplish, and why. And it is good to have signposts and reminders to that. The following thoughts concerning iconography and meaning arise from this direction.

Just before his complete enlightenment, Buddha Shakyamuni was challenged to justify himself, to justify his enlightenment for what it was. He first replied by silently touching the earth. Following that, the armies of doubt, aggression and seduction that had been summoned to defeat him were peacefully conquered without remainder. This moment is depicted in many images of the Buddha, and this gesture is even named as “the earth touching gesture.”

Wisdom symbols like this can have countless meanings, but some are easily suggested. The earth, the ground, is the silent, omnipresent basis that supports all life on earth. In this way it is like the ineffable and inseparable wisdom basis of enlightenment, which resides in all beings and blossoms into complete enlightenment, as Buddha did.



With the moment of this gesture as inspiration, the symbol adopted to represent Saraha Children’s School begins with the Tibetan letter “Sa,” which is of course the first syllable of “Saraha.” But “Sa,” as a Tibetan word has its own meanings as well, including “earth,” “ground,” “basis,” “foundation,” and “level” or “stage,” all of which are widely employed in Buddhist teachings. Thus “Sa” is simultaneously the foundation or support of excellent qualities, and the basis for their growth, like the time of childhood. And the stages by which they advance, like the grades or levels one achieves through education.

Sa also represents peace and peaceful victory, as Buddha did. Natural and indomitable peace pre-empting conflict, and eliminating conflict from the root. This is peace to be believed in and to be aspired to, certainly in intentional Buddhist practice, but not exclusively so. Also for anyone and anywhere, in any age or type of life or endeavor. This wisdom peace as source and way and goal is the root of aspiration for Saraha Children’s School.