



# Looking forward, looking back

In this issue of the newsletter, we reflect on our current direction and future plans, whilst also telling the first part of the story of the Buddha Sāsana Association and the creation of the Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre.

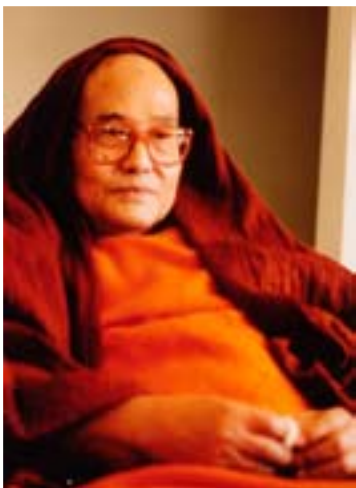
For more than twenty years since the 1980s, hundreds of people have benefited from the activities of the Buddha Sāsana Association as the Centre has grown and developed through the generosity of supporters.

## The first decade

*Graham Wheeler  
Committee Member, BSA*

The Buddha Sāsana Association (BSA) the founding organisation of BMIMC, can trace its roots back at least to 1981. At that time a small group of people who had discovered the benefits of the Mahāsi style of vipassanā meditation during their travels in Asia wished to continue their practice here in Australia. The group at that time included Carol Bigot, Grahame White and Lynne Bousfield.

In 1982, group sittings were held in Sydney and an American friend called Joseph Goldstein was invited to lead two retreats in May and June, held respectively at Wat Buddha Dhamma (35 participants) and Bodhi Farm (50 participants). The group decided to found an organisation, the Buddha Dhamma Insight Meditation Society (BDIMS).



*Venerable U Paṇḍita*

Throughout 1983, group meditation continued in Sydney, led first by Carol, and then by Grahame and Lynne who travelled from Wollongong to Sydney regularly for the next three or so years. Attendance at the sittings fluctuated from highs of 20-30 people immediately following a retreat, to nights when they sat alone. At the same time Grahame and Lynne worked to ensure that at least one or two formal retreats led by overseas teachers were held each year.

Around this time Elizabeth Gorski, John and Sheila Hale and Chris and Tara (Robyn) MacLachlan became part of the informal group. In February and March 1984 ten-day retreats led by Joseph Goldstein and Alan Clements were held at Wat Buddha Dhamma.

It soon became more difficult to obtain teachers from the American Insight Meditation Society (IMS) because of a growing worldwide demand so the emerging organisa-

Inside ...	
New manager and staff .....	4
The meditation centre miracle .....	5
Around the Centre .....	6
Spring building appeal.....	7

tion decided to go to the source at the Mahasi Meditation Centre in Rangoon.

In November 1985 BDIMS sponsored Sayadaw U Paṇḍita to lead a 28 day retreat at Kerever Park, a convent in Burradoo near Bowral, with U Nanapunnika as translator. Fifty people attended and this marked the beginning of the association's links with the Burmese community.

The success of the U Paṇḍita retreat gave an impetus to purchase a property for a permanent home for the association which had decided to change its name to Buddha Sāsana Association of Australia, which became incorporated in November 1986 as a first step towards buying land. Incor-



poration created a separate legal entity which could own property and to which tax deductible donations could eventually be made. The foundation members of BSA were Patrick Kearney (President), Grahame White (Secretary), Lynne Bousfield (Treasurer), Elizabeth Gorski and John Hale.

By 1986, BSA was still not in a position to seriously consider buying a property, so Chris and Tara MacLachlan offered the use of their large home in Blackheath to enable weekend retreats to be held. Seven weekend retreats and one ten-day retreat were held there, with two major retreats held at Kerever Park led by Joseph and Sharon Salzberg (July, 20 days) and Sayadaw U Lakkhana (November, 28 days, 50 yogis).

In 1987, the focus of weekend activities moved from Chris and Tara's house in Blackheath to the Southern Highlands where Elizabeth Gorski had acquired a Bundanoon property which was more suitable for small retreats, (now Santi Forest Monastery). John and Sheila Hale were the live-in managers and consideration was given to developing the property as an official retreat centre.

Major retreats in 1987 were once again held at Kerever Park, led by Alan Clements (March, 10 days) and Steve Smith and Michelle McDonald (August, 20 days, 50 yogis).

In late 1987 and early 1988 there were changes in the membership of the BSA. Patrick Kearney, Elizabeth Gorski and John Hale resigned. Patrick went to Burma and ordained, Elizabeth travelled and continued her practice, John and his family moved to Tasmania.

In their place were new members, Chris and Tara MacLachlan, Malcolm and Vivianne McClinck, Caroline Coggins and Peter Thompson. Grahame White replaced Patrick as President and Chris MacLachlan became Secretary. Graham Wheeler was appointed as public officer and



*Renovating Sasana House, 1988*

honorary solicitor and undertook responsibility for all of BSA's legal work.

By 1988 it was clear that BSA was unable to purchase and develop the Bundanoon property so the search for a suitable site was resumed. A number of properties in Bundanoon and the Blue Mountains were considered but nothing suitable in the price range was found.

Around this time Chris and Tara sold their Blackheath house and they used that money to purchase a neglected two acre property in Rutland Road, Medlow Bath. After discussion with Sayadaw U Pandita, this property was regarded as having some potential for development as a meditation centre. So, on 30 August 1988, eight months after Chris and Tara had bought



*Painting dormitory, 1988*

the property, BSA purchased 25 Rutland Road (lots 1 and 2) from them for the very favourable price of \$60,000. In fact, Chris and Tara received no money from BSA and lent the \$60,000.

#### *Sāsana House is founded*

Sāsana House had been founded and many work weekends were held to paint, renovate and clear

the grounds of blackberry. The first official retreat was a weekend in January 1989 led by Chris with the men's dormitory doubling as the meditation hall.

The major retreats in 1988 were again held at Kerever Park and were led by Sayadaw U Paṇḍita (January, 6 weeks, 50 yogis), Alan Clements (April, 10 days and November, 10 days).

The following year, the focus of weekends shifted back to the Blue Mountains with one-day dhamma talks at Sāsana House being led by Sayadaw U Jaggara (from the Burmese Vihāra in Merrylands) and Ven Pannyavaro. However,



*Retreat, Sāsana House, 1989*

reservations about the suitability of Sāsana House as a retreat centre led to a decision to sell it and purchase a larger vacant lot in a cheaper, non-residential area.

With this in mind, a forty acre property called "Gunnyah" in Nellies Glen Road, Megalong Valley was found. On 3 April 1989 contracts were exchanged to buy "Gunnyah" for \$150,000. However, as fate would have it, the purchase was never finalised—fear of a Buddhist invasion struck the Megalong Valley and neighbours refused to allow the creation of an access road. Contracts were terminated and BSA's deposit was returned.

Around Easter 1989 Gavin and Gabrielle Cusack and their daughter Shane took up residence at Sāsana House as caretaker-managers.

As Sāsana House had proved difficult to sell, a decision was made to take it off the market and try to develop it as an official medi-





*Dhamma hall window: Five faculties*

tation centre. Since funds were a problem, instead of paying Chris and Tara the \$60,000 owed, the vacant land (Lot 2) was transferred back to them on 10 March 1989. In effect this meant that they had given the Lot 1 with the house on it to BSA.

The longer retreats in 1989 were mostly held in Kerever Park. These included 20 days led by Joseph and Sharon Salzberg (March), Steven Smith and Michelle McDonald (10 days, 50 yogis) and Alan Clements (October, 16 days, 40 yogis). During this year, Sayadaw U Janaka taught a number of retreats in Australia, such as the Mt Warning (Murwillumbah) 10-day retreat hosted by the Paitsons.

Sayadaw U Jaggara continued to give occasional one day dhamma talks and there were also regular group sittings every Thursday evening and Sunday morning. Malcolm and Vivianne McClintock resigned as members of the BSA. As Sāsana House was still unsuitable for holding retreats, Kerever Park was again rented for the one big retreat of 1990, two months (April and May) led by Sayadaws U Paṇḍita and U Pannadipa.

Major renovations were undertaken to start converting Sāsana House from a private home into a meditation centre. A new bathroom was put in to provide more suitable accommodation for teachers, interior walls removed and relocated and the dining room was extended. The outside flats were re-roofed and re-lined and an

adjoining bathroom finished. Gavin Cusack and Chris MacLachlan provided most of the technical expertise with help from members and other volunteers.

#### *A resident teacher comes*

BSA's request to Sayadaw U Paṇḍita for a resident monk was approved and Sayadaw U Pannathami was chosen to come in 1992.

Sayadaw U Jaggara continued to give one day dhamma talks at Sāsana House and U Buddharakita (now Steve Armstrong) led a weekend and 1 day course there also. Peter Thompson resigned and Gabrielle Cusack became a member and Treasurer of the BSA.

1991 was the last year of renting venues for retreats. Sayadaw U Paṇḍita led several ten day retreats for adults and children in January at Birrigai and Kerever Park.

In early 1992 the Buddha image in the meditation hall was donated by Leon Prollius, a long time meditator and supporter of BSA shortly before he passed away.

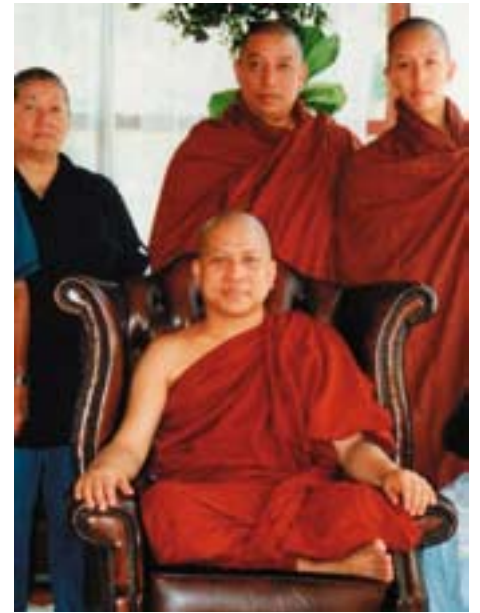
On 16 April 1992, Sayadaw U Pannathami arrived in Australia, sponsored by BSA for a year's temporary residence. Chris MacLachlan took on the task of resident



*Burmese food day*

manager and monk's attendant, sometimes sleeping under the kitchen table due to lack of space during retreats.

After obtaining a Burmese passport with some difficulty, Ko Ko Latt finally arrived in Australia on 8 December 1992. BSA had sponsored him for 12 months and he took over from Chris in look-



*Sayadaw U Pannathami and novices*

ing after Sayadaw. Katie Miller became manager for some months, relieved later by Kim Fisch who also managed and cooked for a number of months. Caroline Coggins resigned as a member of the BSA.

The first major retreats held at Sāsana House were run on a dāna basis, beginning with a ten day retreat from 20 March '92 led by Steven Smith and Michelle McDonald.

Thereafter, Sayadaw U Pannathami led retreats on a dāna basis each month:

- 16 April '92 - 10 days
- 29 May '92 - 10 days
- 26 June '92 - 20 days
- 24 July '92 - 10 days
- 7 August '92 - 10 days
- 21 August '92 - 10 days
- 11 September '92 - 28 days

*We continue the story of BMIMC in the next issue of the newsletter.*

### **Documenting our history**

We are currently attempting to document the history of BMIMC, especially through photographs.

Do you have any photographs of people and events especially from the 1980s, that we can copy and add to the BMIMC archive? If you can help, please ring 4788 1024.

## FROM THE MANAGER

*Chris MacLachlan*  
Manager

It has been said that when your children finally leave home it is a mixed blessing. This was certainly true for Tara and myself. When our daughter Pixy left home and went to study at Melbourne University we found ourselves missing her presence while discovering new spaces to pursue our Dhamma practice.

We were presented with an opportunity for Dhamma service when Kris and Shan, the previous managers, left the Centre.

From October 1<sup>st</sup> we took up residence here at Medlow Bath, myself as manager and Tara as a staff member. When the centre began Tara and I were in residence with our children and now we are back again. As a Burmese friend said, "This is your good Kamma". We certainly feel blessed by the opportunity to commit ourselves more fully to serving the Dhamma.



On staff again is David Smith, who many will know from his period as centre manager a few years ago. David has been coming to the centre regularly since then and sitting several retreats some years, sometimes taking on kitchen duties and assisting during and between retreats. Tara and I are both enjoying working more closely with him.

Many will also remember Donald Elniff, a previous manager returning after several years working in Taiwan to join our resident Dhamma community later in 2004.



(Jill Shepherd, our long-serving past manager, has also recently been helping with administration and our heartfelt thanks are due to her for a great job.)

We all share a commitment to the Triple Gem, the Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre and the Mahāsi tradition of vipassanā practice. Together we will be working at BMIMC to provide the most

*Chris and Tara MacLachlan*



supportive conditions for yogis to pursue their practice through meditation, study and service.

The centre is managed by the committee and staff and is here for all sangha, both ordained and lay yogis. First and foremost it is a place for intensive practice, but it also provides the opportunity to be involved in a Dhamma community. Additional to the regular retreat program may be one-day workshops, when invited teachers will present an opportunity to explore a particular aspect of the Dhamma, occasional dhamma study groups, and a weekly day-time group sit for those unable to come at night.

Local yogis can join any of the regular staff meditation periods (daily at 7-8am and 5-6pm) or may practise in the hall at their convenience. All of us here at BMIMC extend a welcome to anyone who would like to come to practise meditation or to give Dhamma service in the garden, kitchen or building maintenance. Please call to talk to us about how you would like to volunteer at the Centre.

Since 1988, when the Association established Sāsana House, there have been many changes. Due to the generosity over the years of fellow BSA members, yogis, Dhamma friends within the Burmese community and many others supporters who have given resources, labour and time to help develop and run the centre, we have taken a derelict house and two acres of blackberries and pine trees and created a fine Buddhist meditation centre. May all beings share the merit of our generosity.

*Further comments by Chris on the Centre's future are included in the article on the Spring Building Appeal, page 7*

### Centre news from our website

Read current Centre news by visiting [www.meditation.asn.au/news.html](http://www.meditation.asn.au/news.html). This page will carry information about activities in the Mahāsi tradition to be found elsewhere in Australia.



# The Meditation Centre Miracle

Jill Shepherd

It's now just over a year since I finished as manager at BMIMC, and thanks to the generosity of all those who donated to the staff scholarship fund, I was able to sit a three-month retreat with Joseph Goldstein and others at the Insight Meditation Society, Barre, Massachusetts.

IMS has been running for almost thirty years and is one of the largest and longest-established insight meditation centres in the West. It is located in the New England countryside two hours or so from Boston, and is set in many hectares of oak, maple, birch, beech and hemlock forest.

The annual three-month retreat begins in autumn, just as the leaves are beginning to turn. New England in the fall is world-famous, but the intensity and range of colour changes that the trees go through has to be seen to be believed. Leaves of rich dark red, scarlet, vermillion, orange, gold, yellow and every shade in between lined the forest paths. Nestled in between the leaves, vibrant orange salamanders sat completely still, seeming to have total faith that the meditators walking past would have enough mindfulness not to tread on them. Not so the chipmunks, who dart around at a frantic pace, cheeks bulging with acorns to be stored for the long winter ahead.

By the end of the retreat the long winter ahead had definitely arrived. Over a metre of snow fell on the weekend that silence was broken, creating perfect Christmas card scenes in the surrounding countryside. Fresh snow softened the bare black silhouettes of winter trees. Icicles hung like molten glass from neighbours' roofs, and thick ice sheeted over the nearby beaver ponds. Sharp winter sun-

light refracted in rainbows from crystalline snowflakes, somehow a perfect metaphor for transformation and renewal. And impermanence of course.

Throughout the changing seasons and the changing mental states of the one hundred meditators in their care, the IMS teachers, staff and volunteers provided unobtrusive yet dedicated support, based on many years experience of running such retreats. This was the 29th three-month retreat that Joseph had taught there, and most of the other teachers have several decades of teaching experience too.

IMS has recently opened a new self-retreat facility nearby, the Forest Refuge, for long-term meditators, and we were given a guided tour of this centre on the last day of the retreat. It is a complex of well-designed timber buildings in a secluded forest setting, providing accommodation for up to thirty meditators to do long-term practice. The Refuge was opened by Sayadaw U Paṇḍita just over a year ago, and has a mixture of monastic and lay teachers in residence throughout the year (including some, such as Daw Ariya Ñāṇi, who also lead retreats at BMIMC). More information about both IMS and the Forest Refuge can be found on their website at [www.dharma.org](http://www.dharma.org).

Although it was tempting to stay on at the Forest Refuge, I had to fly out of the United States due to visa restrictions. I left IMS in awe of how well such a large and complex enterprise was run, and intensely grateful for having had the opportunity to practise in such a well-supported setting.

Within a few hours I had arrived into the chaos of London a fortnight before Christmas. After a



brief stay with my sister, it was a relief to escape to the relative sanity of Amaravati Buddhist Monastery in the Hertfordshire countryside, an hour north of London.

Amaravati is a Thai forest monastery in the tradition of Ajahn Chah, and its abbot is his senior disciple, Ajahn Sumedho. There are usually about 24 monks and nuns in residence, plus the same number of lay people staying for a maximum of a week at a time. A retreat centre alongside the monastery runs dana retreats throughout most of the year, taught by the Amaravati monks and nuns.

Although the monastery was about to close for the annual 'rains' retreat (held in the English winter), I was fortunate to be allowed to stay on as one of the lay support team for three months. In return for working in the kitchen for a few hours each morning, we were able to participate in the monastics' retreat, attending morning and evening pujas, meditating and listening to dharma talks given by Ajahn Sumedho and the senior monks and nuns.

For me this was an ideal way to make the transition from the formal silent practice of the IMS retreat towards more everyday life: the daily routine mixed light work duties and talking with as much (or as little) sitting meditation as seemed appropriate.

There were twenty of us on the support team, from many different parts of the world. Most of the team members had many years of involvement with retreat centres

## AROUND THE CENTRE

In addition to our new manager and staff, and the higher levels of energy to be experienced around the Centre, we have been upgrading our equipment in a number of ways.

For many years, volunteers have laboured in a less than adequate kitchen. All this has begun to change. There is the story of the new stove that begins with the generosity of a yogi who formerly ran a kitchen appliance business.

He overheard Jill Shepherd complaining about our ancient gas cook top and offered to find us a new one at a substantial discount.



*From old gas rings, to a new stainless steel gas and electric range*

Thanks to him, we now have a brand new stainless steel commercial electric oven with five gas burners, plus a stainless steel splashback and range hood in place of the old, increasingly dangerous cooktop, and working in the kitchen is now a completely different experience!

We were recently awarded a grant from the Department of Family and Community Services to buy new garden equipment. We now have a heavy duty self-propelling lawnmower, a mulcher and a scrub-cutter & line-trimmer to make working in the grounds less backbreaking.

## *The Meditation Centre Miracle (continued)*

or monasteries in their home countries. They all had moving stories to tell of their personal dharma journeys, and of the development of their dharma communities.

Having spent some time 'behind the scenes' in a meditation centre myself, it was both fascinating and reassuring to hear of the challenges that other individuals and organizations have faced in trying to support the establishment of dharma centres in the West.

I returned to Australia seven months later with a deeper respect for the fact that any dharma centre exists at all, let alone survives! For a centre to originate takes a seemingly miraculous coming-together of individual and collective effort, time, money and many other intangible factors. For it to continue to exist, those same factors are still required, but with the addition of large amounts of patience, goodwill and equanimity in the face of the inevitable up and downs.

In the short time that I've been back at BMIMC helping in the office part-time, there have been many improvements to the facilities. All of these have been brought about by the efforts of people who have attended retreats and had the desire to help out in some way.

Being on staff, I have the inspiration of seeing many different people find many different ways to make contributions to maintaining and improving the Centre. There are many examples to choose from, but I'd like to name just a recent few besides that of the story of the new stove (see above) and of course, the success of our building program:

- a Medlow Bath neighbour who kindly brought his porter's trolley to help us move the old stove. He heard us talking about the need for safety mats and donated a heavy-duty rubber non-skid floor mat to go in front of the new oven.
- a Katoomba meditator who has volunteered to work at the local food co-op on our behalf so that we can use her 20% staff discount to buy retreat food.
- a Sydney man who was able to drive the retreat teacher to and from the Mountains so that the managers did not have to do it, saving us time and money.
- members of the Burmese community who individually paid for the airfares and food for Sayadaw U Lakkhana's retreat.
- several meditators who regularly donate new kitchen equipment, linen, household goods and warm clothing for meditators (Please contact Tara to know more about spare equipment we might be able to use).
- all the people who have volunteered as cooks and kitchen assistants, and who have stayed at the Centre between retreats to help with retreat preparation, gardening and maintenance.

Thanks to everyone's efforts, the Centre's facilities continue to improve, making staying here more pleasant for the meditators as well as staff and volunteers. We hope that you will find it a beneficial place for your practice, and look forward to seeing you again at your next retreat.

# Second Spring building appeal

*This newsletter highlights the growth of the Centre over a 20 year period.*

*It also brings us full circle, with the renewed involvement as staff of Chris and Tara MacLachlan, who were moving spirits in founding the Centre in those early years.*

*To continue to build on that vision is our present challenge, and so we announce our second Spring Building Appeal.*

In spring last year, we appealed for funds to complete the fit-out and finishing of the nine-bedroom building. That work is now done and largely paid for, thanks to the ongoing donations from our two appeals per year.

The Vesak appeal in May contributed a further \$10,000 towards our two objectives for 2004. These are to repay some \$12,000 in loans that helped to bridge the funding shortfall for completing the first building, and then, to re-start the building process. About \$50,000 is needed for the fitting and finishing work, in total about \$62,000.

What will happen once we have completed the fitting out of the second block of single rooms?

Chris MacLachlan outlined some thoughts about the way the facilities might further develop:

“Once the second block is finished the situation for yogis will improve out of sight, with single rooms and modern bathrooms for all.

“Sasana House will then be free for other uses. Possibly the large dormitory could become a more spacious dining room in the interim.

“Our long term plans approved by council include more single rooms, new kitchen, dining room, office, staff quarters and an extension of the Dhamma hall.



*Shwedagon Pagoda, Yangon*

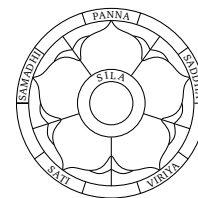
“This is the long-term plan and I’m sure it will all come to fruition eventually, gradually improving on the facilities that we can offer to yogis to practise the Buddha’s teachings.”

So we will once again be contacting past and present participants. Your donation, large or small, will bring us materially closer to finishing the second building and setting a new standard of accommodation for both men and women.

We offer you the opportunity to make a manifest difference to the standard of facilities for meditators at BMIMC, to experience the joy of dāna and to contribute to the development of Buddha-dhamma in Australia by completing and sending the donation form on this page.

*Please note:* A letter will be sent to all of those on the mailing list as part of this appeal.

*Thanks to all those who have helped in the sustained effort to get the buildings to this stage. Your efforts and generosity are much appreciated.*



## Spring 2004 Building Appeal Donation form

I would like to donate -

- \$20
- \$50
- \$100
- \$200
- \$500
- \$1,000
- \$ .....

to the BMIMC Building Fund. All donations to the Building Fund are tax deductible. A special receipt will be issued.

- A. Please find enclosed my cheque payable to *BMIMC Building Fund*, or
- B. Authorisation to debit my credit card for the amount of \$ .....

Bankcard  Visa  M'card

Card No

.....

Cardholder Name .....

Expiry date .... / ....

Signature .....

*Thank you!*

Please post to:

BMIMC  
25 Rutland Road  
Medlow Bath NSW 2780





**INFORMATION REQUEST AND DONATION FORM**

If you would like to receive the newsletter or make a donation to the Centre, complete this form and send to BMIMC, 25 Rutland Road, Medlow Bath, NSW 2780.

Name .....

Address .....

I would like to make a donation of \$ ..... to the Building Fund  General fund   
*Donations to the Building Fund are tax deductible*

Authorisation to debit my credit card:

Bankcard  Visa  M'card  Card No .....

Cardholder Name ..... Expiry date /

Signature .....

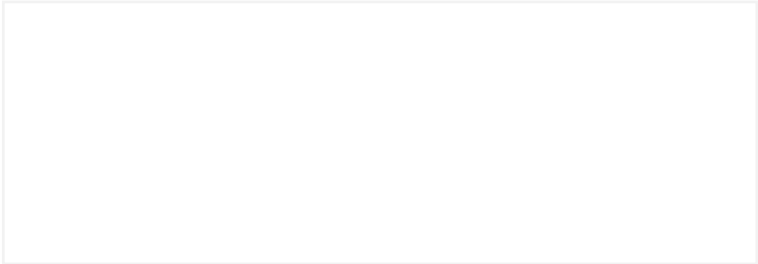
*If the word LAST appears on your address label, you will need to contact us to continue to receive our newsletter.*

If undeliverable return to:  
Buddha Sāsana Association of Australia Inc  
25 Rutland Road  
MEDLOW BATH NSW 2784

**SURFACE  
MAIL**

**POSTAGE  
PAID  
AUSTRALIA**

Print Post Approved  
PP246166/00005



The Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre is a non-profit organisation owned and managed by the Buddha Sāsana Association of Australia Inc.

*Address:*  
25 Rutland Road, Medlow Bath,  
NSW 2780 Australia

*Phone/fax:* 02 4788 1024  
*E-mail:* [bmimc@pnc.com.au](mailto:bmimc@pnc.com.au)  
*Website:* [www.meditation.asn.au](http://www.meditation.asn.au)  
*ABN:* 11 005 353 218

**For current news, courses  
and other information,  
visit our website at  
[www.meditation.asn.au](http://www.meditation.asn.au).**