

BUDDHA SĀSANA

Newsletter of the Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre



Guiding virtues for community leaders

John McIntyre, Management Committee member

In his last dhamma talk of the recent five-week retreat held during April and May, Sayadaw U Vivekananda was asked to address some remarks to community leaders among the meditators. This article describes these qualities and reflects on their application to the work of a Centre management committee.

Sayadaw U Vivekananda spoke of six virtues that community leaders (*nakaya*) might cultivate as wise persons who work both for themselves in the practice and also for the benefit of others. He referred to a Pali text well-known in Burma, the *Loka Nīti* (section 119) and gave examples from his own experiences in Lumbini, establishing the Panditarāma International Vipassanā Meditation Centre.

Many who were present felt this talk was helpful in clarifying the ethical values that can guide leaders—both those who manage Buddhist organisations like BMIMC dedicated to making available the Buddha’s teachings on insight meditation, and those who lead local meditation groups.

BMIMC occupies a special place in the diverse Australian Buddha-Dhamma, as many supporters will appreciate. Though small in scale it is large in significance as a unique Australian centre where one can practise *vipassanā satipaṭṭhāna* in the tradition of Mahasi Sayadaw of Burma in a Western context.

Those who manage the Centre in accomplishing this mission are conscious as a committee of working within Buddhist values. The function of a management committee is to face issues, both the routine and the more challenging. Questions may arise as to how to deal with an issue and what ethical values will help the committee arrive at a wise response. Hence, the Sayadaw’s discussion of the six virtues seemed particularly relevant.

The first value described was that of *khamā*, translated as tolerance, patience and forbearance. A committee of management will often find it is working with divergent needs and opinions in the community and in its own deliberations, ‘dealing with all the imperfections of being human’ as Sayadaw put it. This virtue is present in the capacity to be patient with others and to forgive, and is necessary in the mediation of conflicts. It works with other virtues described below, such as kindness to others (*dayā*).

The second virtue mentioned was that of *jāgariya*, translated as wakefulness, vigilance or alertness. A management committee that is ‘asleep at the wheel’ is obviously not functioning as it should, whereas

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SIX VIRTUES

- tolerance*
- wakefulness*
- sharing expertise*
- rousing exertion*
- sympathy and kindness*
- courageous decision-making*



an effective one is alert to matters that need to be addressed in the community and also in its own functioning as a group. One might say that a committee needs to be watchful as to the suitability and benefit of proposed courses of action, especially in confronting an situation that 'will not do' when a certain courage is required to resolve it (see the sixth virtue, *ikkhaṇa*).

A third virtue, *uṭṭhāna*, refers to the quality of 'rousing exertion' or energy (*virīya*), zeal or industry and literally means 'to rise up or stand'. This value might be seen in a committee finding the energy to take a new direction or to 'rise to a challenge' that circumstances present.

Clearly, wakefulness to an issue needs to be followed by rousing exertion to deal with it. Sometimes community leaders need to inspire effort in others. This quality might also be seen when a committee's success in dealing with an issue results in the quickening of its collective energy and zeal.

A fourth quality is that of *samvibhāga*, meaning 'to share or divide among'. Sayadaw observed that community leaders sometimes find they are the only one with the necessary knowledge or skills needed to solve a problem, and they must 'step into the gap'. This is sharing of expertise in a spirit of generosity (*dāna*).

A fifth quality is *dayā*, sympathy or kindness in dealing with others, a quality that especially complements *khamā* or tolerance among the other virtues. It is evident in the willingness to relieve the suffering of others, sympathy for their difficulties and the development of compassion (*karūna*). Sayadaw mentioned leaders of sitting groups will have this quality in mind in giving dhamma talks.

Finally, there is a virtue indispensable to an effective committee of management—that of *ikkhaṇa*, which refers to 'having the foresight with regard to benefit and suitability' (Vs.16) and the 'taking of courageous decisions'. In conjunction with the energy and zeal of *uṭṭhāna*, it has a character of 'heroic vigour' and involves knowledge or wisdom (*paññā*).

Sayadaw observed how the steady development of facilities in Lumbini Panditarāma has come about as a result of the courage to trust that the necessary *dāna* will be forthcoming to realise the plans being made. The BMIMC committee's own deliberations about the future of the Centre have seen this virtue come into play.

In February, the Committee made a decision to embark on further development and build new staff accommodation and upgrade the kitchen facilities. In doing so, it resolved to do what is necessary to realise the goal. This entailed both foresight in deciding that the most pressing priority was better staff facilities and then a certain courage in 'taking the plunge' with a belief that the resources to make it possible will follow, as they have in the past.

Sayadaw at each point in the talk mentioned how these virtues can guide the work of leaders of local meditation groups. He concluded his talk on community leadership by placing the six virtues in the context of spiritual friendship as explained in the *Karaniya metta* and *Kakacupama* suttas.

This talk was as inspirational as those that had come before on many evenings during the retreat. We thank the Sayadaw for the generosity of his teaching and look forward to a third visit to BMIMC in coming years.



*What should be done by one
skillful in good*

*So as to gain the State of Peace
is this:*

*Let him be able, and upright
and straight,*

*Easy to speak to, gentle, and
not proud,*

*Contented too, supported easily,
With few tasks, and living very
lightly;*

*His faculties serene, prudent,
and modest,*

*Unswayed by the emotions of
the clans;*

*And let him never do the
slightest thing*

*That other wise men might
hold blamable.*

from the *Karaniya Metta Sutta: Loving
Kindness*, Sutta Nipata 1.8 translated
by Ñanamoli Thera. Reproduced from
the website, Access to Insight, at [www.
accesstoinsight.org](http://www.accesstoinsight.org)

The joys of dhamma service

Beth Steff, staff member

For this article, Beth Steff invited several volunteers to share their experiences of giving their time, energy and enthusiasm to the Centre. We hope this will inspire supporters to commit to a time-slot next year during the 2010 seven week retreat with Venerable Ariya Ñāṇi.

At the end of each retreat, participants are invited to consider returning to BMIMC to help out supporting a retreat, often through assisting in the kitchen. It is an integral part of the way the centre operates. In volunteering a person supports all the meditators, the teachers, the Manager, other staff and the wider community. It's an opportunity for a person to practice *dāna*, the generosity of giving.

BMIMC has a *dāna* exchange system where each day of help in the kitchen entitles the volunteer to a full day's sitting on a future course free. Helping out on a weekend workshop generates a free place at a weekend course at a later date or a credit of two days on a longer course.

In the last few years there have been longer retreats at BMIMC such as the three month retreat with Venerable Ariya Ñāṇi from April to July 2008. While these are of great benefit for the meditating community they also require very solid staff support. At such times it is of immeasurable value to have one or two people who can offer large blocks of time to be on the cooking "team".

Beth's story

After being on staff at BMIMC in 2006, a period of practice in Burma and Malaysia confirmed my choice to continue a Dhamma focused lifestyle. Vimutti Monastery, in the Forest tradition of Ajahn Chah near Auckland, New Zealand was home throughout 2007. I enjoyed the freedom to meditate many hours of the day outside of the



required afternoon work period and the chance to have a dedicated three month's intensive meditation during the Rains Retreat. I took the opportunity to study with Bhante Gunaratanā at the Bhavana Society, USA, in 2008 and 2009, again with ample periods of seclusion. I greatly valued his inspiring mix of wisdom, clarity, mettā, humility, warmth and humour.

I chose to come to BMIMC for the longer retreats in 2008 and 2009 as I value being able to give back to the Centre that became a springboard for an enormously beneficial inner journey now spanning four years. Apart from the extraordinary beauty within the natural environment I have been fortunate in developing enriching friendships with returning yogis, cooks and local folk.

I would like to thank all who I have met up there, to date, for their generosity and company. In being of service to the monastic teachers, I have learned much from their complete commitment to the Dhamma and the inspiring qualities that emanate from such wholehearted focus. In July I return



to New Zealand for the Rains Retreat at Vimutti Monastery before transitioning back to a more regular lifestyle in 2010 where I plan to offer support/coaching for groups and individuals in mindfulness and finding resonance in life with what is sacred.

Our volunteers

Linda Pheely: I enjoy coming to BMIMC to volunteer because I feel I am giving back to all those who have volunteered for me in the many years I have been coming to retreats. I also get a lot of satisfaction from helping Tara with the unenviable job of trying to keep the garden under control. More helpers with gardening would be wonderful as it is quite daunting on your own!

Grant Keene: For the fifth year in a row this year I cooked for the January retreat. A lot of voluntary work supports the activity of BMIMC. Six years ago I decided that I wanted to find a way of giving to the centre, and this is my way to give. Once again I was surprised by the amount of work that goes on behind the scenes in running a retreat, and in running the centre, and once again felt I got more from the experience than I gave.

Selena Blair: The centre is like my second home. When I arrive I feel like 'I'm home'. It's a place where I know I'm always welcome and there's always something that needs doing. I never mind what I do. I get great pleasure from helping in the garden and just generally being up there, pottering around with whatever is needed. I enjoy the pleasure of being with other people who have their various different connections to the Dhamma.

Robyn Howell: You think when you go there to cook that it's about being in the kitchen but it's so much more than that! You get to see how the Centre runs from the other side.

The joys of dh

You meet people who run the place and get to know them better; you see how much work they put in for the love of the Dhamma, and you come to realise that everyone is on the path and learning at different levels.

At times you may be overly judgmental with yourself, seeing something within as being enormously negative. Within community there can be an experience of perceiving similar tendencies in others. This can help to see that others may be facing and working through similar challenges and one's own obstacle isn't nearly so difficult anymore. There's time when volunteering to sit and talk with the teachers, and are opportunities to ask those questions that you've been dying to ask but decided not to bring up in the meditation hall.

Justine Lee: For me one of the best things about volunteering at BMIMC is it's environment. I volunteer in the Centre's kitchen once or twice a year and I always feel safe and supported whenever I'm there. This seems to come from something that I can't really name which seems to infuse the centre, and it is everywhere—around the meditation hall, the buildings, the trees, the paths, and even the car park. I think it must be the fruit of all the practice, work and commitment of everyone involved throughout its life and I feel privileged to have the opportunity to contribute.

The past managers and Tara, the current manager, have all been very welcoming and supportive. Being an avid cook I have a great time cooking while knowing the other cooks and I am giving other staff a break so they can rest or do other things. Tara really looks after us volunteers and I always enjoy the ginger tea she shares with us in the mornings and the chats we



*Donor's Buddha rupa, 322 CE.
The earliest known dated image made in China.
San Francisco Asian Art Museum.*

have over meals. Then there are the walks, the stupa to sit quietly by, a chance to meditate and the Dhamma talks—there is nothing more a volunteer can ask for. I hope to continue my bit for the centre for many years to come.

Isabelle Phillips: I have a lot of gratitude for BMIMC and what the Centre has given me over the years, the teachers I have met and sat with. Cooking is a way to build my connection with the Sangha and to say 'thank you'. And to be perfectly honest, cooking for 22 yogis with a dedicated shopper and sous chef in a great kitchen in such a peaceful location is a pretty joyful experience.

Margarita Sampson: On my first retreat at BMIMC I'd come directly from working as a busy chef and had just sold my business, so one



of the very great joys of that retreat was to be fed by someone else with wholesome and homemade food, three times a day—and desserts as well! No-one had told me that going on retreat didn't have to be about sackcloth and ashes, but about caring about yourself and being cared for as well.

I carried such a profound sense of gratitude from that retreat that when I had the opportunity to offer in return what had meant so much to me, I decided to jump in and do it, namely through cooking for Sayadaw U Vivekananda's five week retreat April/May 2009. So what's it like to assist for a retreat? It's an opportunity to have the time and space to work mindfully without distractions, to know that your work is appreciated, to assist yogis on their way, to work with wonderful people, and to take space for yourself.

What did I take away from the retreat? I loved watching the yogis every day doing their walking meditation with great perseverance, coming into the warmth and the light of the meditation hall in the evening; watching the sunrise through the kitchen window and hearing the bird sounds; sleeping alongside my friend the possum (who slept in the wall cavity), meeting all sorts of people who regularly gave their time to help at the centre and who were all lovely, laughing always in the kitchen, rattling in the cupboard for Chocolate Freddo Frogs when I was tired, bushwalking on weekends and having afternoons to try out different cafes and bookshops in the area.

Time for me when I needed it, so that I came back into my 'regular' life very grounded and calm. Watching Beth and Tara manage the changing needs of a long retreat, always with patience and

Dhamma service

kindness. Spending time in the wise and always gentle presence of the Sayadaw, and learning what it might be like to spend five weeks on retreat, one of my goals for next year.

Assisting on a retreat meant for me having many teachers. I'll definitely be doing it again, and I'd encourage anyone who has been thinking of it and has the time, to do it. A longer retreat has its own rhythm, its own sweet time, and I was grateful to be a part of that. *Metta* to all of the yogis who participated—and I bet you never even missed the chocolate frogs!

Liz Oski: Dhamma practice takes a priority in my life, so the BMIMC meditation centre is like my second home. Living close to a Buddhist Centre has been a lifestyle choice for me since my first retreat in 1978.

Associating with Dhamma friends has a supporting benefit to my practice and I never feel spiritually isolated or alone. Since becoming a Buddhist I have formed some very long friendships based on openness and honesty. During times of doubt or difficulty my friends are there to support, encourage me and point out my blind spots and shortcomings.

There are many ups and down in our practice as the years roll on and there is much to understand as we progress on the path. As I am not particularly close to my family or relatives, my Dhamma teachers and friends at BMIMC are my spiritual family and I value the connection beyond anything in this world.

Cooking for the yogis at the centre brings me joy and happiness, as this is the natural result of practising generosity. Although sometimes I go home feeling tired, there has never been a time I have not gone home with a feeling of satisfaction



and joy of my time well spent. I have seen generosity practiced by Asian Buddhists and I have always felt that I fall short and consciously need to work on developing this parami. Who knows where I will be reborn in my future life—so I need to attend to how I spend my time NOW. We can't ever have too much merit in the Karma Bank account.

I began my Buddhist practice in the Thai Forest Tradition while living at Wat Buddha Dhamma for six years in the early 80's. I was there cooking, cleaning, publishing the newsletter and gardening. I also lived at the Buddhist Library as a caretaker for seven years and have been part of several committees at Buddhist monasteries and centres.

I purchased a home in the Blue Mountains to be close to the BMIMC centre, so that I can come for Dhamma talks, assist and attend retreats. At the Centre I find continuity with my practice as all the



teachers are from the same Mahāsi tradition, which I absolutely love. I have been doing this practice since 1984 when Joseph Goldstein came to teach *vipassanā satipaṭṭhāna* at Wat Buddha Dhamma. If you understand this quote, you will see why I choose to assist at BMIMC.

“Life is like bubbles, delicate and fragile. Precious moments once experienced simply disappear. How we have lived and loved is all that matters in the end.”

Editor's last word

As I edit this article, looking for images to accompany these heartfelt thoughts and feelings, I find myself remembering my own experience as a yogi on the April/May retreat. Intensive practice can be hard work at times, and how welcome can be that next nourishing meal—the more welcome for the spirit in which one knows it has been prepared. The heart lifts in gratitude that one is so sustained by others.

Then walking out from the dining hall, sometimes one reflects on the generosity that has created this centre from its early beginnings—its staff, its grounds and buildings, its ethos—and there is joy in being part of the dhamma work that has seen the Centre prosper as it has.

Metta to you all, dear readers, and may you find the time to volunteer in 2010 and experience the joys of dhamma service.

John

Dhamma service weekend

Diary date:

26 - 27 September

FROM THE MANAGER

Tara MacLachlan

Hello to all BMIMC friends and supporters! The Centre has been humming with all the effort of the many yogis who have been on retreat since the beginning of the year. This makes it a very rewarding place to live and work.

I walked back into the middle of Patrick Kearney's January retreat after returning from my own retreat at Panditarāma in Nepal. My retreat leave in Nepal was made possible by the generous support of committee member Robyn Howell, who stood in as manager.

This month-long retreat has been a significant event on the BMIMC schedule for some years now and we have been fortunate to have such a committed local teacher in Patrick. However, Patrick has made plans to pursue his own practice in 2010 and unfortunately we will not be conducting this retreat next January.

Patrick will return this September for a nine-day retreat and as usual it has been fully booked well in advance. It is anticipated that Patrick will continue to teach here in coming years in some capacity.

After January, two retreats in February and March were led by Graham Wheeler and Danny Taylor, both committee members and leaders of the Sydney Group Sit in Glebe. These weekends are always very popular and attract both regulars from the Sydney group and others new and 'old' to the meditation practice.

Later in March our local Sydney Sayadaw, U Pannathāmi came for his regular retreat at this time. Sayadaw was the first resident teacher here in the early days of the centre. (Patrick Kearney is the only other teacher to be in residence at BMIMC). Sayadaw now has a centre, Panditarāma Sydney (see the website at panditaramasydney.org), with new facilities located in Smithfield, for residential retreats.

April began with the Easter retreat led by Michael Dash, who is another of the Sydney Group Sit leaders. Michael will be conducting a weekend late in January 2010—incidentally, that weekend will be the only opportunity provided to practise here during that month.

In April we were fortunate to have a five-week long retreat with Sayadaw U Vivekanada from Panditarāma Lumbini in Nepal. This was the long awaited second retreat for Sayadaw here at the centre. Sayadaw first came to BMIMC in 2007 for six weeks and very soon after his departure this second retreat was full.

An extended retreat is an inspiration for both the meditators and for those who volunteer and support them. My gratitude goes out to all of you who offered time and energy over the five weeks, particularly to Beth Steff and Margarita Sampson who were here full-time.

The most recently completed retreat was for seven days taught by the Venerable U Vamsarakhita. The Venerable had previously only been here for four days over Easter last year. So it was a great opportunity to get to meet him again and develop the Centre's existing relationship with him.

Finally, I hope I will see many of you in the near future at BMIMC. Please check the schedule for the next round of retreats and take note that Sayadaw U Lakkhaṇa's two retreats have now been confirmed.

My heartfelt thanks to everyone who has been a support to the centre for this last six months during and out of retreat time. I wish you all good health and much happiness.

Tara



Dhamma service weekend

Just a reminder to put the September dhamma service weekend in your diary. The last weekend of September is traditionally the time of year for the annual spring-cleaning, when supporters near and far give some time to the many tasks involved. An overnight stay is possible

It is a good opportunity to part of the collective effort to maintain the centre and its grounds and gardens and to catch up with old friends from Sydney and locally.

An old friend visits



A few of us recently caught up with Jill Shepherd, BMIMC manager for some years from 2001 and on staff before that. Jill (centre) was briefly visiting the mountains, after returning home to Aotearoa/NZ from the USA for a short time to see her parents. Jill continues to work at the Insight Meditation Centre, Forest Refuge (Massachusetts, USA), presently in a counselling and yogi support role. We all wish her well in her dhamma life.

The Canberra group

Lesley Lebkowicz

The Canberra Insight Meditation Group flourished in the first part of the year with the commitment of about ten meditators who not only came regularly to the Sunday evening practice but also found up to an hour a day in their busy lives for practice. Another ten or so people came when they were able and so the group reached a good size—small enough to be able to know each other and big enough to sustain group support even when some people were away.

As well as our weekly practice we held a non-residential weekend retreat and went on a mindful bushwalk in Namadgi National Park. The atmosphere of ten mindful people in the bush was so peaceful no-one felt inclined to talk at lunch time. At the end of the walk we shared left-over chocolate and hot drinks and talked before driving home to change for the evening sit.

Further days of practice and mindful bushwalks are planned for winter and spring. A new monthly dharma discussion group one is beginning soon.

Meeting times:

The Canberra Group meets from 6.30 p.m. until 8.30 p.m. on Sunday evenings at the Sākyamuni Buddhist Centre, 32 Archibald Street, Lyneham. The group is led by Lesley Lebkowicz (formerly Fowler). Contact Lesley on lesleyf@netspeed.com.au or just turn up on the night.

The Sydney meditation group meets at the Life & Balance Centre, 132 St John's Road, Glebe from 7–9 pm each Friday except long weekends. Three BMIMC teachers (Graham Wheeler, Danny Taylor, Michael Dash) take it in turns to lead the group and will give practice instructions.



Site of the proposed staff accommodation, below the top car park

The Vesak appeal: a new staff building

In April many supporters will have received an early reminder of the usual way in which we mark Vesak—the remembrance of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and passing away—that is, with our annual building appeal.

Since our last appeal, significant funds have been committed to several projects. First, funds were applied to meet a long-overdue need—a safe pathway and steps leading from the carpark to the yogi accommodation. This virtually completes an extended effort to create good walkways around the centre, with great benefit in ease of movement for meditators.

We also had removed the small caravan and landscaped the top car park area.

A second project was plumbing work to prepare the Centre for connection to the new Sydney Water sewer, including the installation of a compulsory grease trap and meter, and reconfiguring the existing enviro-system tanks.

Such projects are necessary and they have drawn heavily on our existing reserves in the Building Fund.

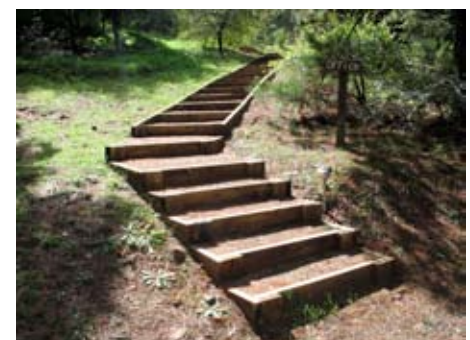
Yet these are minor works in comparison to the future development now being considered by the management committee. In February, the committee decided to proceed with a new building project that gives priority to better staff accommodation and an upgrade of the kitchen.

Though we have approval to do so, it is not intended to expand the number of yogi places. This would require extension of the meditation hall and the kitchen and dining areas.

A new staff building will offer better conditions for dharma service and create more flexibility in our use of spaces. The new building will have self-contained units that may be used for overflow yogi accommodation.

Clearly, it will take a considerable effort over coming years to generate the necessary funds for any new building, so we are beginning now to build up the necessary funds to start this development, trusting that we will find the resources for this worthwhile new facility in the generosity of supporters—generosity, over the years, that has made it possible for the Centre to prosper as it has.

With this goal in view, we offer you the opportunity to donate to the Building Fund. Donations are tax deductible and a special receipt will be issued. Simply copy and mail the form on the back of this page or contact the manager.



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.

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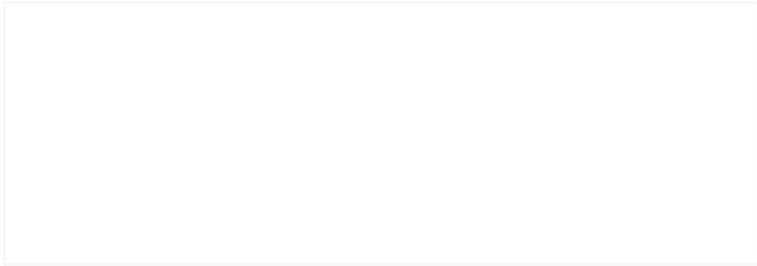
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