

Buddha Sāsana

Newsletter of the Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre



Autumn Winter 2013

EDITORIAL

Welcome to this Autumn-Winter 2013 edition of the Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre newsletter.

It was this time last year when Yael Wasserman and Danielle Clark offered to become residential caretakers, to live at BMIMC and bring their skills and energies to the Centre, joining Edwina Dawson our co-ordinator and office manager. A year has seen many changes and Yael describes these in the staff report. [Read more.](#)

On-line presence

For some months now we have been operating with a full retreat schedule thanks to the efforts of Marc Allas in organising retreats on behalf of the management committee. Yael has organised an on-line course schedule that can be continuously updated, so there is always a 'new schedule'. We are continuing to expand the possibilities of an on-line presence with more updates about centre activity.

Soon the website will have a new look and functionality. This is timely since the existing site has changed little since it was designed in 2002 and it now receives over 1 000 unique visitors per month.

Much of the work of developing the new site, which will have the same address, has been kindly donated by Scott Donald and his company Creativ Digital. Scott's generosity is much appreciated.

Volunteers day

In late July the Centre hosted an event to mark our appreciation of the work of volunteers across the organisation. The day began with morning tea and meditation, followed by a delicious lunch and speeches. Graham Wheeler spoke of the twenty -five year history of the Buddha Sasana Association and Danny of the many different ways in which people associate with BMIMC and contribute to its work. Thanks to Yael, Danielle and Edwina for looking after the organisation on behalf of the management committee. [See more images of the day.](#)

Fundraising

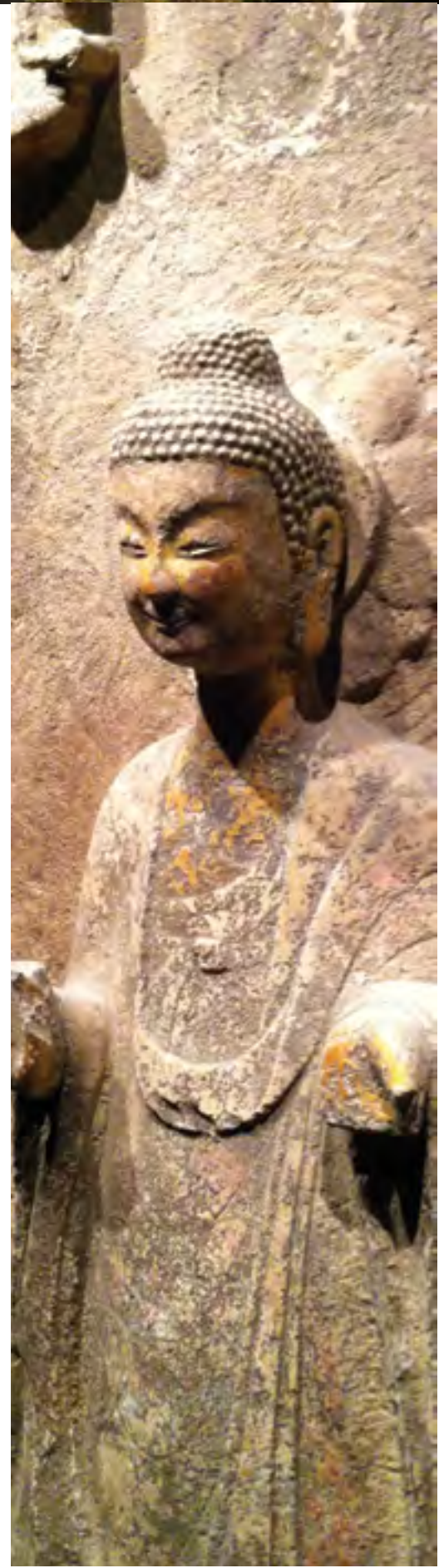
This year's Vesak Appeal for funds to upgrade the kitchen has been very successful, raising \$19 350 including a large donation from one anonymous supporter. There will continue to be many demands on finances to maintain and improve our facilities in this way, but we also need to keep our bigger goals in view. So the building of staff accommodation is once again a priority for action. The plans are approved, there is the will to make it happen, we just need more funds to get started. It is easy to give now on-line. [Read more.](#)

Classic Dhamma Books

While dhammaseed.org is well-known as a source of dhamma talks, there are other sites that make books freely available. The Buddha Educational Association in Taiwan (www.budaedu.org) stands out. Their mighty efforts to re-publish significant texts from the diverse traditions are making some older dhamma books more readily available, both in print form and on-line in PDF format. The editor reviews three of these, including Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw's *Fundamentals of Vipassana Meditation*. [Read more](#)

All at BMIMC look forward to seeing you some time, either to practise or to volunteer. You will always be welcome.

—Editor



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FROM THE CENTRE TEAM

A busy year for retreats

One of the great joys for the staff has been the opportunity to meet and get to know so many yogis and volunteers. It is also a very special privilege to be able to see the Dhamma through the lens of a range of different lay and monastic teachers—it seems wisdom comes in many flavours.

Those who love statistics might like to know that over the last year to June 2013, the Centre held 15 courses ranging from two to 30 days with almost all fully booked. Courses were taught by 12 different teachers attended by 181 yogis, 30 of whom attended more than one course. The gender split was 58% women to 42% men. All of the required meals prepared by over 20 different volunteer cooks. More uncounted hours were contributed by volunteers in gardening and maintenance and administrative and committee work.

One highlight was the month-long retreat taught by Sayadaw U Vivekananda who is a senior meditation teacher in the Mahasi tradition and the abbot of Panditarama Lumbini International Meditation Centre in Lumbini, Nepal. This was his fourth visit to BMIMC. Sayadaw, referring to the world heritage values of the Blue Mountains National Park, reminded us that BMIMC plays an important role in maintaining 'dhamma heritage' in Australia.

Self-retreat period

It was great to see people making use of the three week self-retreat period which ran over the new year. In all, 12 people used the opportunity to sit for periods ranging from two days to two weeks. This meant there were often only two or three people here at any one time. It was also a special time for residents Danielle and Yael who supported the retreat. There is something quite powerful about the sight of a lone yogi walking quietly along the path to the Dhamma hall in the morning—worthy of a haiku.

So it only seems natural that we do something similar over the next new year so we have scheduled in a two week self-retreat period from 27 December to 10 January 2014. For more details please refer to the schedule on our website or contact Danielle at danielle@meditation.asn.au.

A new cookbook

There's a new cookbook in the works. The current book, while still top of the Centre's best seller list, is now just over ten years old and a little past its use-by date. The new edition will include the best elements of the old combined with a bunch of new recipes that are more reflective of the meals currently served on retreat, which these days are mostly gluten free.

Jan McCarthy has generously offered to put this together, bringing together her expertise in cooking, writing and publishing. We thank Jan for this wonderful and well-timed initiative. The cookbook will be available at the Centre for \$25 in October.

Garden and grounds

Our April Dhamma Service Day was a day enjoyed by all who attended and the garden and grounds look all the better for it. We thank Selena Blair, Jan & Margaret Mohandas, Don Elliot, Meredith Brownhill, Jo Flanagan, Fiona McKillop, Gabrielle Cusack, Donald Elniff, John McIntyre, Helen Wang, for coming along and helping out.

Outside of Dhamma Service Days the garden continues to evolve and transform into an indigenous flora environment with dozens of recent trees and shrubs



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planted by native plant and bushcare expert Meredith Brownhill.

We are also working to improve the Rutland Road entrance to the Centre with the construction of a new garden. Apart from reducing the amount of lawn to be mowed (a considerable burden for caretakers for eight months of the year), the garden bed provides more opportunity for tree planting and also helps direct visitors from the entrance gate toward the office. This should be especially helpful for newcomers who often report being confused about how to find their way into the Centre.

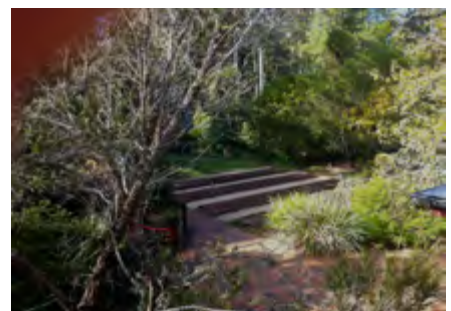
Maintenance: the eternal to-do list

With five buildings and two acres of grounds, maintenance is pretty continuous especially with the wear and tear from our courses being so well attended. We use a range of professional tradespeople, mostly local, but wherever possible we like to use skilled volunteers. We are very fortunate to have long term local supporters like Don Elliot living down the road. Don volunteers many hours working through an ever-growing to-do list and providing technical guidance to the staff to ensure a safe environment for staff and visitors.

Some of the big maintenance jobs and expenses over the last 12 months have been: tree lopping; installation of bathroom exhaust fans; replacement of the vacuum cleaner for the hall; electrical work; refurbishing and insulating the residents' cottage; servicing the heating system; repairs to external steps and dozens of other minors jobs.

There will be a number of big expenses over the next year or two such as repainting the buildings and improvements to the verandah bathroom. We are currently putting together a maintenance forecast to give us a clearer indication about how much we will need to spend over the coming years to ensure the physical sustainability of the Centre. Essentially this will mean moderate spending in the short term to avoid major expenses down the track.

—The Centre team



NEWS FROM NEAR AND FAR

Jill Shepherd returns

The retreat schedule carries details of Jill Shepherd as a lay teacher now associated with BMIMC. Jill will be known to many as the manager of the Centre a decade ago, during which time she was instrumental in designing and building the new student accommodation.

Jill has spent the last seven years living and working at the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts. A graduate of the Community Dharma Leader course at Spirit Rock (San Francisco) she is now participating in their extended Retreat Teacher Training program. Spending much of her time in Australia, she is teaching at BMIMC and other centres here and in New Zealand. For further details of Jill's teaching, please visit <http://jill0shepherd.wordpress.com/>.

Tara's illness

As her many friends already know, in March at a family birthday celebration, Tara collapsed with a cardiac arrest due to the sudden rupture of a major abdominal vein. Fortunately, there were present four emergency nurses who resuscitated her. She was rushed to hospital where she underwent surgery and remained for some time in intensive care. She is now recovering well to the relief of family and her many concerned dharma friends. Tara would like to express her gratitude for all the loving support she has received during this time.

Beth at Abhayagiri

Beth Steff has sent the news that she has received approval from US Immigration for a Religious Worker visa till May 2015 with the support of the

abbot of Abhayagiri. After her tourist visa was extended, she waited a year for news that would allow her to stay. Beth says that she 'greatly appreciates the bountiful support and well wishing' that friends have sent and she is sure it helped with this result. She feels blessed to be able to continue to experience the Dhamma at Abhayagiri.

Dhamma Book Group

Jo Flanagan hosts a Dhamma book group which meets on the second Tuesday of the month at 7pm at her house in Leura. The group is currently discussing Jack Kornfield's *The Wise Heart*, reading a chapter a month. If you would like to join the group, email Jo on josephine.flanagan@bigpond.com.

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THANKING OUR VOLUNTEERS

Photos of the day by Liz Oski and Daniella de Angeles

On Saturday 20th July, the Centre hosted an event to mark our appreciation of the work of volunteers. Thanks to Yael, Danielle and Edwina for looking after the organisation of the day on behalf of the management committee. The day began with morning tea and meditation, followed by a delicious lunch and speeches. Graham spoke of the history of BSA and Danny of the varied ways that supporters give their time to make the Centre the special place that it is. After lunch, there were awards for diverse contributions and a pub quiz that tested communal knowledge. Our thanks also to those who couldn't make it on the day. We hope you will be able to join us next time!



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CLASSIC DHARMA BOOKS

The mighty efforts of the Buddha Educational Association based in Taiwan are unlocking a treasure house of dhamma as this organisation re-publishes many Theravada and Mahayana texts including some classics of the modern Buddhist era. Published now for free distribution in different languages, these books may be found in Buddhist temples, libraries and meditation centres. Other notable sites that offer free e-books include Abhayagiri monastery (www.abhayagiri.org/books).

There is a flood of contemporary publications popularising Buddhism in this the 'information age', not always without diluting the good dhamma. These free books comprise some of the treasures made over the short life of Western Buddhism over perhaps the last hundred years. This review looks at several key English titles that can enrich our understanding of meditation practice and its grounding in the Pali canon. They may offer fresh perspectives on the Mahasi tradition and Western insight meditation practices.

Thus, meditators may want to seek out Mahasi Sayadaw's *Fundamentals of Vipassana Meditation* (1961) perhaps to better understand the 'Mahasi approach' in terms of the master's own teaching. Here is the insistence on unremitting effort in continually noting sense objects and mental states without 'imbibing' the contents of experience. One comes to appreciate the simplicity and directness of approach and a great warmth and magnanimity regarding the certainty of meditators making progress in insight. There are other Burmese texts among the publications, including the collected 'manuals' (including the 'manual of insight') of Ledi Sayadaw, an earlier and revered teacher (born 1843) who had a key role in the first transmission of Buddhism to the West.

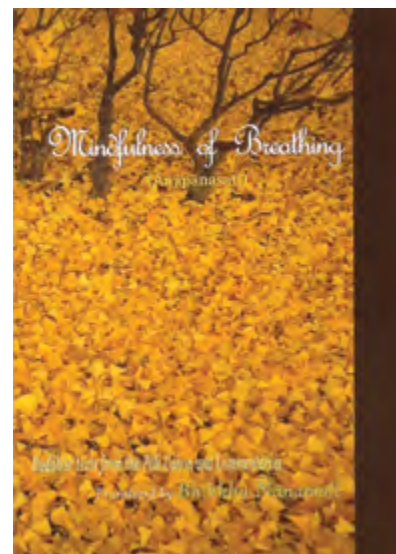
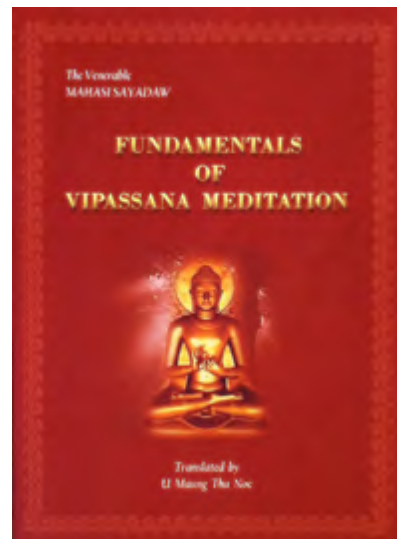
A second treasure is *The Mindfulness of Breathing (Anapanasati)* by Nanamoli, the English scholar monk who some sixty years ago made the first authoritative English translation of *The Path of Purification*, the manual on Buddhist meditation (also available online on the BEF website). Nanamoli at the time translated for his own use all the relevant suttas and their commentaries on meditation on the breath. This collection, published 1952, provides a broader textual perspective on *satipatthana vipassana* practice and the progress of insight alongside concentration practice. It is interesting to see how the extracts from the Commentaries on the suttas explain the development of insight.

A third treasure is Thanissaro Bhikkhu's *The Wings to Awakening*, originally compiled for the Barre Centre for Buddhist Studies (1996). Thanissaro, whose lineage is the Thai forest tradition, organises the Buddha's core teachings on the path to Enlightenment in several sections each introduced by his explanation and usefully cross-referenced. He translates many key terms in a somewhat unusual way (the 'domains of mindfulness' become 'the frames of reference'). Though at the outset these translations seem strange, they do have a certain power to refresh our understanding. There is an interesting section on *satipatthana* that describes three developmental 'stages' of object, process and transcendence rather than in terms of the insight knowledges. He then reviews various 'Western insight meditation practices' in this light. There is much more to be found in the 300 pages of this valuable anthology.

Finally, there is the *Buddhist Dictionary* by Nyanatolika, revised by Nyanaponika (author of *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*) and pioneer of the Buddhist Publication Society in Sri Lanka. It is helpful for meditation practice though by no means essential to have a knowledge of the precise Pali terms for many phenomena and the key doctrines of Buddhism. This classic manual provides both.

Such are some gems that await discovery in your local Buddhist temple, or on-line as PDFs from the website of the Buddha Educational Association, www.budaedu.org. We can be grateful that these dhamma books are so readily available.

The Editor



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FUNDRAISING

Thanks to everyone who contributed to this year's Vesak Appeal which highlighted the need to upgrade the kitchen and make the work of volunteers safer, more efficient and more enjoyable.

Through the generosity of many donors we have raised \$19 350 which is most of the target of \$22 500 including a large donation of \$10 000 from a donor who wishes to remain anonymous. This generous response will ensure that the project can commence and be completed in June-July 2014.

The current kitchen is over twenty years old and for many years it has functioned as the hub of yogi support during retreats. The renovation work will reorganise the preparation, cooking, storage and cleaning areas with stainless steel benches, new storage drawers, cupboards and shelves, new commercial cooking equipment such as mixers and food processors and a dishwashing machine and two new ovens. We thank Daniela de Angelis for her design and Robyn Howell for volunteering to project manage the installation when the time comes.

Building staff accommodation

It is twenty five years since the Association came to occupy the Medlow Bath property and begin the development of the Centre as we know it today. So much has been achieved in that time.



Plans for the staff accommodation



Two years ago we first turned our attention to the building of new staff accommodation. With the kitchen upgrade assured, we can resume our fundraising for this important goal.

There has always been a plan to expand the Centre so we can offer more places in retreats, but realistically this cannot happen without us first improving the living conditions for staff.

Plans are approved for two self-contained one bedroom units near the top north-eastern corner of the property on Rutland Road.

We want to make living at the centre more comfortable and pleasant for resident staff who often give up employment or careers to serve the Dhamma. This will help us retain good staff and improve our capacity to support yogis in their practice during retreats.

We need significant funds to advance this project. Quotes from builders in 2011 put the cost at \$100 000 to \$120 000 to build to lockup stage or a total figure of \$180 000 to complete the work.

There is an amount already donated from appeals in early years to this worthy objective. We need to add to this earlier effort.

All donations to the Building Fund are tax deductible. Your donation will work to expand the Centre and bring the benefits of the Dhamma to more people. You can donate now online through the 'Givenow' facility by going to:

www.meditation.asn.au/donating.html