

BUDDHA SĀSANA

Newsletter of the Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre



Farewell, Tara

John McIntyre, Editor

As deep winter settles over the Blue Mountains, the Centre seems to lie dormant, in seasonal recess. The grass ceases to grow, the currawongs dig deeper into the compost for a meal, the leafless trees await the warmth of spring. Venerable Ariya Nāṇi's retreat of seven weeks, long anticipated by yogis, staff and volunteers, has come and gone.

The seasonal change again reminds us that nothing stays the same—this is true of the life of the centre, maintained as it is by the efforts and energies of many people. This inevitability of change we acknowledge in this Winter issue—we are preparing to say farewell to our long-standing manager, Tara, who later in the year will complete her service and enjoy a richly deserved sabbatical in Nepal.

We know her as a practised manager with a steady and competent style and as a respected Dhamma teacher—but in a larger sense, we farewell someone who has played a founding and guiding role since the earliest days.

So, from our hearts, Tara, we say 'thank you' for those full years of service and your great contribution to BMIMC over the years. May you fare well and happily! *Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!*

In this issue

Meditator profile. Faith Teh recalls how life after university has led her to the Mahāsi tradition and her recent period of service at BMIMC prior to travelling to Burma to further her practice.

Classic Dhamma Books Graham Wheeler introduces a series of reviews of influential guides to insight meditation, with a review of Nyanaponika's 'Heart of Buddhist Meditation'.

The Western Buddhist experience We give a summary of Glenys Eddy's 2003 research on meditators' practice at BMIMC and the Vajrayana Institute.

Archiving the Dhamma John McIntyre reflects on the process of putting away some twenty years of Dhamma talks recorded on cassette tapes at BMIMC.

Manager's report Tara MacLachlan farewells us as manager at BMIMC with some reflections about her Dhamma service and her plans for next year.

The Building Program We reprint our appeal for funds to garner the resources needed to build a new staff building now approved by Blue Mountains City Council.

UN International Day of Vesak. The Australian observance of the UN International Day of Vesak was held recently in Parliament House, Canberra.



A MEDITATOR'S LIFE

Faith Teh gave Dhamma service for the seven weeks of Venerable Ariya Ñāṇi's retreats at the Centre. She tells how she came to be involved in the Mahāsī tradition and her aspirations to ordain and practise in Burma later this year.

In 2002, Faith graduated from University with a Commerce degree and began full-time work but things did not go too well. She was unhappy, even depressed, over conflicts with her boss, until things came to a head and she left.

A few days later, wandering around the city, she found herself in the book section at Myer's, where she came to a shelf of Dalai Lama books. *The Art of Happiness* caught her eye and she thought 'I really need a dose of that' and since it was 'quite digestible', read it through there and then. Every page spoke to her.

Though she knew nothing of the Dhamma or *vipassanā* meditation, there was no turning back from then on. She talked to Buddhist friends (Faith is Malaysian Chinese) and started going to the UNSW Buddhist Society and a few months later tried a Goenka retreat at Blackheath with them. She felt 'thrown in the deep end' but stayed the course because of her friends. This led her to practise in the Goenka way for three years.

Meanwhile, Faith was keeping in touch with her mother in Malaysia who was concerned about her getting involved in a 'meditation cult'. Then, a Mahāsī practitioner persuaded her mother to sign up for a retreat in Sabah. Her mother found the retreat very rewarding, and Faith, after further reading, realised it was different from the Goenka approach.

The next year she and her mother attended a Mahāsī retreat led by Sayadaw Jnanapurnik. She says she really took to walking meditation

as it supports the sitting and helps to cut through restlessness and torpor.

Part of her journey in the Dhamma included participation in a two week 'novitiate program' organised in 2008 by the Venerable Mahinda at BodhGaya, India. This involved a huge group of 300 people from all over the Asia Pacific, ordaining as *samaneras* or *samaneris*, with robes and accommodation provided.

The daily timetable was demanding: wake at 4am, chanting at the Bodhi Tree followed by breakfast, then a Dhamma class from 9 to 11 with meditation in the afternoon, a talk from 7 until 9 and bed at 10.

This gave her a 'taste of renunciation' and she found it a heart-opening experience. That experience led her to realise that she 'had the capacity to renounce' and strengthened her resolve to practise.

One night, three nuns gave a Dhamma talk together, short talks but very inspiring. One in particular spoke with a quiet firmness and conviction about why it was so important—though the goal of *sotapāna* seems so distant, it is achievable in this lifetime! Faith then realised that she possessed the rare conditions for her practice—her health, freedom from worldly worries, the capacity to practise and a desire to progress.

Last year Faith turned thirty, which she felt to be a turning point. Back in full-time work, again she found it demanding and stressful, affecting her peace of mind so much that it undermined her volunteer counselling work with Lifeline. After much deliberation, during a retreat at Wat Buddha Dhamma over the Christmas holidays, she made a determination to resign with two months notice—gaining time to reflect and plan a different future.

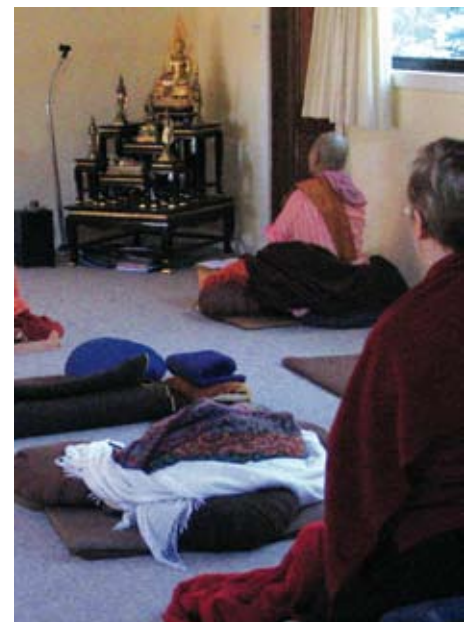


Faith Teh

During April and May Faith worked as a kitchen assistant at BMIMC during Venerable Ariya Ñāṇi's retreats. She didn't think seven weeks serving for an ongoing retreat was too much, since full-time work had kept her too busy for Dhamma service over the past years.

She believes the experience will prepare her well for the next stage of intensive practice. It has been helpful to talk to the Venerable about the different 'flavours' within Burmese Mahāsī practice. If parents approve, Faith plans to be at Ashin Indaka's monastery in Yangon, Burma for the Rains Retreat.

We all wish her well in her Dhamma journey.



THE WESTERN BUDDHIST EXPERIENCE

Western meditators are not often born into a Buddhist culture, yet their meditation experience can lead them to develop a Buddhist perspective on life. What is the process of becoming a Buddhist in this way?

Glenys Eddy explored this question in her 2003 doctoral research. She interviewed practitioners affiliated with two Buddhist Centres, Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre and the Gelugpa Tibetan Vajrayana Institute.

Glenys Eddy's starting point is that Western Buddhism is usually an experience of conversion. She wanted to understand how meditators become 'converts' and committed Buddhists.

She found that this occurs through a process of 'self-transformation' as meditators take up and apply new beliefs and practices in their lives.

A person becomes a meditator through a process of religious (or philosophical) experimentation when the claims of a religious reality are tested against inner understandings and convictions, and 'validated' through experience.

These understandings become clearer as a result of experimental participation in religious activity. The adopted Buddhist worldview becomes more meaningful as it 'frames' personal experience.

In this way, meditative experience (and its interpretation according to Dhamma) is tested for whether it improves the 'quality of lived experience'. It must be relevant to current living, and ethically sustainable.

Commitment arises through the meditator gradually accepting and successfully discerning the three marks of samsaric existence—*dukkha*, *anicca* and *anattā*—as an interpretive framework for lived reality.



Gandharan (Graeco-Buddhist) sculpture
Asian Art Museum, San Francisco

The Noble Eightfold Path comprising the three groups of *silā* (ethics), *samādhi* (concentration) and *pañña* (wisdom) provide a strategy for negotiating lived experience in the light of meditation techniques, which are specific to each Buddhist orientation.

Meditation practice applies doctrinal principles (the three characteristics, the Path, the five faculties and so on) in one's own transformation. Or to put it another way, these principles are discovered in one's meditative experience. [This seems especially true of our Mahasi tradition of *vipassanā* meditation with its rigorous experiential investigation of mental and bodily phenomena—Ed.].

Glenys Eddy participated in retreats and workshops and interviewed participants in order to understand how the activities of a Western Buddhist Centre assists their exploration of Buddhism and their eventual commitment to Buddhism.

Individuals take an actively experimental attitude toward the new group's activities, withholding judgment while testing the group's doctrinal position, practices, and expected experiential outcomes

against their own values and life experience. In an environment of minimal social pressure, transformation of belief is gradual over a period of from months to years.

Deeper understanding of the nature of the commitment process is provided by viewing it in terms of religious resocialization, involving the reframing of one's understanding of reality and sense-of-self within a new worldview.

Glenys describes four stages that mark the transition of the Western Buddhist from being a 'seeker' to a committed adherent—engagement, apprehension, comprehension, and commitment. This transition is a process of 'socialization'.

Engagement is the first and tentative orientation to Buddhism while *apprehension* is the understanding of core Buddhist notions.

Comprehension occurs through learning how various aspects of the worldview form a coherent meaning-system, and through application of Buddhist principles to the improvement of one's own life circumstances. It requires an understanding of the fundamental relationships between doctrine, practice, and experience.

Commitment to the group's outlook and objectives occurs when these are adopted as one's orientation to reality and found to be an efficacious and ethically sustainable strategy for negotiating life. Sustained commitment is conditional upon continuing validation of that experience.

Glenys Eddy. *The Western Buddhist Experience*. PhD Thesis, Department of Religious Studies, The University of Sydney. Accessed on-line at ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/2227.

Archiving the Dhamma

Twenty years is not long, but over two decades the centre has gradually accumulated a body of Dhamma talks recorded on cassette tapes.

These cassette tapes were intended as a record of esteemed teaching, to be replayed or perhaps occasionally transcribed and published in the newsletter.

Cassette tapes! and the machine called a 'cassette deck' for playing them! The digital revolution has outmoded the technology and made the tapes all but redundant—yet they are Dhamma, so in May the tapes were archived. Doing so prompted some reflection on the changing forms of the Dhamma.

It is not so many decades since an earlier generation knew Theravada Buddhism only from a few books and publications of the Buddhist Publication Society and issues of *The Wheel*. Meditators going to Burma in the 1950s may have found English typescripts of talks by the Mahāsī Sayādaw (U Sobhāna Mahathera) and others.

In the mid-eighties, Burmese Sayādaws and their followers were making the Mahāsī tradition available to the West, and soon there were new guides to stand alongside Nyanaponika's *Heart of Buddhist Meditation* (1954, see review in this issue) and Rahula's *What The Buddha Taught* (1959).

The archive includes many talks by Sayādaw U Pandita (the Centre's guiding teacher) and senior American lay teachers—Steve Armstrong, Michelle McDonald, Sharon Salzberg, Allan Clements, Steven Smith and Joseph Goldstein. The earliest talk, from 1977, is by Jack Kornfield. There are, of course, many talks by the Centre's visiting teachers over the years.



John at work archiving some twenty years of taped Dhamma talks held by BMIMC.

As the era of the cassette tape passes into history, we can appreciate all the more the benefits we enjoy of ready access to digitised Dhamma through Internet archives such as dhammaseed.org and accesstoinsight.org.

A letter of thanks

I would like to thank Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre so very much. There are many things that I would like to give thanks for but the major ones are:

1. The ongoing invitation to Sayādaw U Lakkhaṇa, (Kyaswa Sayadaw) that since 1998 has given us the chance to meditate with a highly skilled and respected Burmese teacher.
2. Providing and continuously improving healthy food and an environment so we are able to meditate energetically and gain high level wisdom.
3. Highly principled conduct of all retreats, such as the fact they are completely silent, which also leads to gaining a high level of wisdom.

I have been meditating at Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Center every year since 1998 due to the full support of yogis from the

centre I am very satisfied with my level of meditation. There are many retreat centers around the world including Burma but very few where we can meditate energetically to gain the high level of wisdom.

We know yogis need good health, nutritious food, a conducive environment and high principles such as Noble Silence to be able to energetically meditate and gain the high level of wisdom which is the main aim of *vipassanā* meditation.

Without this Centre, I personally would not have gained much wisdom at all, therefore I would like to thank BMIMC so very much and wish that the centre may be able to run retreats continuously and benefit all yogis. *Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!*

May all beings be able to share my good deeds.

Julie Moe Moe



UN Observance of Vesak

An impressive ceremony was held in the Great Hall, Parliament House in Canberra to mark UN International Observance of Vesak. All major traditions were represented with many ethnic communities present: Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, Burmese, Thai, Lao and Sri Lankan.

A gift of the English Tripitaka to the Parliament was accepted by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and relics were donated by the Sri Lankan High Commissioner. The formalities included chanting by *sangha*.

CLASSIC DHAMMA BOOKS

The Heart of Buddhist Meditation

This newsletter begins a series of reviews of Dhamma books that have been important influences on the lives and practice of those associated with BMIMC.

Graham Wheeler, management Committee member and a senior lay teacher at the Centre, here tells of his discovery of Nyanaponika Mahathera's inspirational essay on satipaṭṭhāna practice.

I was staying in Kandy, Sri Lanka in late 1979 when someone lent me this book by Nyanaponika Thera. At that time, there were not many books about Buddhist meditation in English and so this was a real revelation.

After reading this I knew I wanted to try the meditation that it described. Fortunately, I was able to locate a nearby monastery called Rockhill Hermitage that taught insight meditation to lay people in English. Although I only stayed at Rockhill for about a week, the experience had a profound impact and I've been practising insight meditation ever since.

The work itself consists of three parts. Part One is an explanation of the significance of the practice and its methods and aims. This part includes a commentary on the Buddha's actual teachings and an outline of the revival of meditation in Burma and the technique that evolved there. Part Two is an English translation of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* and Part Three, an anthology of texts translated from Pali and Sanskrit dealing with right mindfulness.

This structure means the book provides an introduction and overview of the practice together with a wealth of resources for those who wish to delve more deeply into the Buddha's teachings on meditation.

Over the years I have read this book

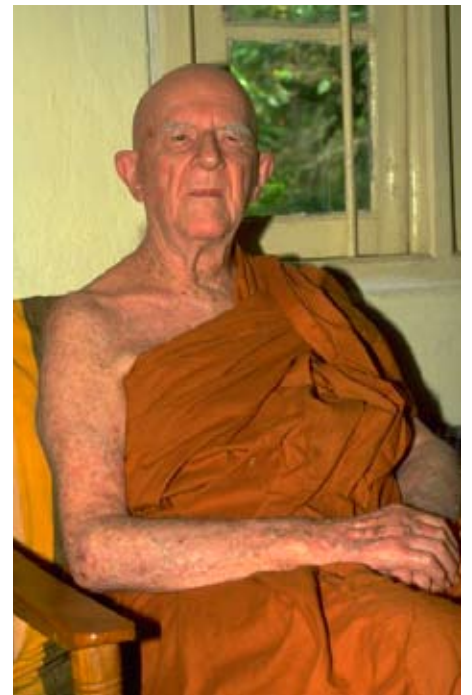
on several occasions and each time it seems to offer something new that was not previously apparent to me. I also enjoy Venerable Nyanaponka's didactic style of writing which reflects his great proficiency with language.

Ven. Nyanaponika was born into a Jewish family in Hanau, Germany in 1901 as Siegmund Feniger and in early 1936 (following Krystalnacht) left Europe for Sri Lanka to join an older, German-born monk, Nyanatiloka Thera, at the Island Hermitage. Despite being interned during World War Two he was able to complete the German translations of several Buddhist scriptures and compiled an anthology of texts on *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation.

In 1952, both Nyanaponika and his teacher Nyanatiloka were invited by the Burmese Government for consultation in preparation of the Sixth Buddhist Council and to re-edit and reprint the entire Pali Canon and its commentaries. It was at this time that he also completed a period of training in insight meditation under the Venerable Mahāsī Sayadaw.

In 1958 a society for the publication of Buddhist literature in English, called the Buddhist Publication Society (BPS), was established and Ven Nyanaponika appointed as its founding editor. He held this position until 1984 when poor health necessitated his retirement, though he remained as president of the Society until 1988. Venerable Nyanaponika passed away on the 19th of October 1994, the last day of his 58th rains retreat as a *bhikkhu*.

The Heart of Buddhist Meditation is a modern spiritual classic, which Erich Fromm, the esteemed neo-Freudian author, described as 'A work of unique importance, written with great depth, extraordinary knowledge, deep humanity



Nyanaponika Maha Thera late in life

... I do not know of any book which could be compared to this work as a guide to meditation'.

Editor's note. Graham has a reply written by Nyanaponika Mahathera to his letter to the Venerable in 1988 expressing appreciation of *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*. This was just at the time the Buddha Sāsana Association was establishing Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre.

The Venerable wrote appreciatively of the new Association's desire to make possible the study and practice of *satipaṭṭhāna vipassanā* in Australia and enclosed a copy of one of his many publications—later included in his *Vision of Dhamma*.

Nyanaponika was the mentor of Bhikkhu Bodhi, whose moving memoir 'For the Welfare of Many' can be found on Access to Insight, June 5, 2010, at http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/bps-essay_28.html.

The story of the German lineage of monks at the Forest Hermitage in Sri Lanka, can be found at www.payer.de/neobuddhismus/neobud0203.htm. It was also there that the Venerable Ñāṇamoli (an English monk) completed his great work of translating the *Vissudhimagga*.

FROM THE MANAGER

Tara MacLachlan

This will be my last newsletter report as manager of BMIMC. My plan, as some of you already know, is to take a year off to spend some extended time in Nepal at Panditarama Lumbini, both for practice and to offer support to Sayadaw U Vivekananda and Sayalay Bhadda Manika. I will be leaving BMIMC sometime around the end of October to early November.

It will be six years that I have spent here at the Centre—difficult to believe that so much time has passed—and it has been an incredibly rich experience, offering many challenges and rewards.

Either way, I can't emphasize enough how much benefit this has been for me, to my intensive meditation practice and a significant practice in itself providing some great opportunities to integrate mindfulness into daily life and to develop the four Brahma Viharas—loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity.

Hurting others

amounts to hurting oneself.

Displaying the faults of others

amounts to exhibiting ones own.

Stressing their good qualities

amounts to revealing our own.

Shabkar (1781-1851)

Shabkar, a Tibetan poet, says it much more eloquently but his words are reflective of my understanding of the Dhamma, of my own experience and of my attempts to engage with everyone with whom I have had contact in my role as manager and in my life in general.

While it has not always been possible to live up to my own expectations, let alone those of others, many rewards have come from this intention. I think my greatest happiness in being at the centre,

experienced so recently at the end of Venerable Ariya Nāṇi's seven week retreat, is seeing a yogi's faith and joy in the Dhamma ignited by their own efforts, together with the teacher's guidance and the staff's support. And often I have had the opportunity to see how this flowers further in their lives—the release from an oppressive situation, a journey to practise with great teachers overseas or a decision to take robes.

I sometimes get offered thanks for my contribution to such events, which causes much happiness to arise and deepens my own faith in the Dhamma. Of course, it is not so easy when something I have done has the opposite effect, causing distress both for myself and the other person.

However, just as in intensive practice, I have a lot to learn and gain from adversity, from those times when things can seem too much.

This is when *sangha* comes to the fore and I have been very fortunate over the past six years to receive some wonderful support at such times—so I give my heartfelt thanks to those people, who include my Dhamma teachers, family and some special friends.

While living at BMIMC I have had the opportunity to travel to Nepal for my own practice every year but now feel it's time to take an extended break and expand my horizons—both inner and outer—and in this light I'd like to finish with more of Shabkar's words, which seem fitting for a trip to the Himalayan region.

I wish all the best to those staying behind to carry on the work at BMIMC, with a special acknowledgement to the members of the management committee for their ongoing commitment and



support. And I want to thank all of you, who have attended retreats, worked as volunteers or donated to the centre in any way, for giving me the opportunity to support you in the Dhamma.

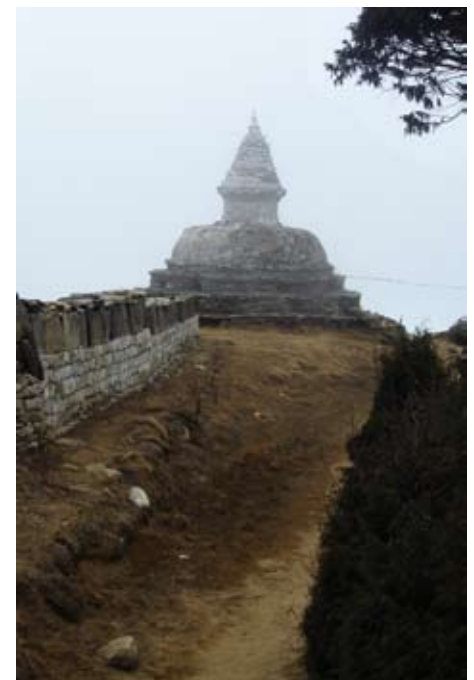
With much metta

Tara

*One must remain in the vastness,
alert and lucid,*

*Letting one's gaze encompass
the infinity of the sky,*

*As though seated on the summit
of a mountain open
to all the horizons.*



Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

FUNDRAISING AND THE BUILDING PROGRAM

As supporters will know from the recent Vesak appeal letter, BMIMC has received approval from Blue Mountains City Council to build the new staff accommodation described in the Summer newsletter.

Those who have been on staff over the years will know only too well how much this building is needed. It will offer better conditions for Dhamma service for our dedicated staff and create more flexibility in our accommodation. The building will have two self-contained units of about 35 sqm each.

Before we can build we must be sure that the Building Fund has sufficient funds for us to obtain quotations for completion to lock-up stage.

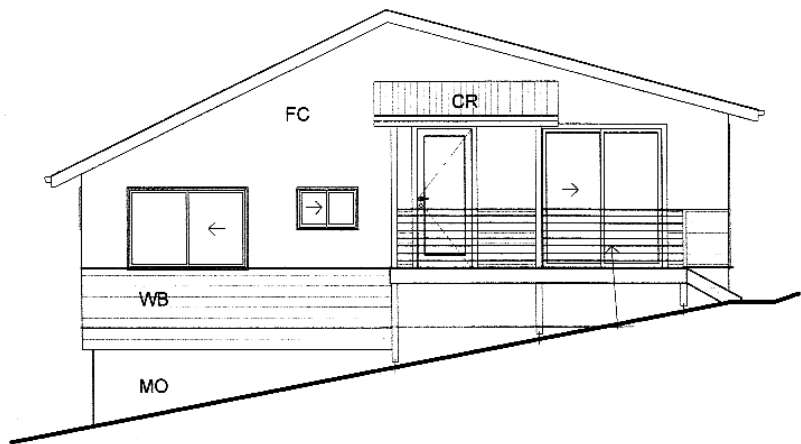
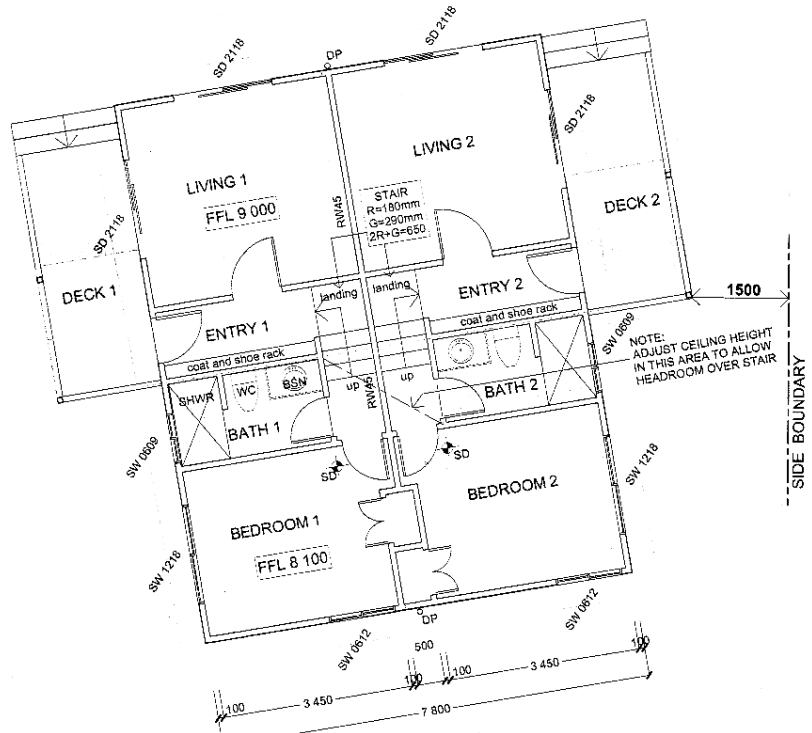
Now is the time to give a mighty boost to the Building Fund and help kick-start the project.

The completed building will cost in the region of \$180 000. \$1500 will pay for a square metre to lock up stage. It would be wonderful to receive donations for some larger 'green' items such as solar hot water \$2500 (after rebates), a 1.5Kw photo-voltaic solar power system, (about \$6000 after rebates) or a water tank. Of course, all donations, large or small, are welcome.

Over the years, generosity has made possible everything we esteem and value at BMIMC and continues to ensure that the Centre prospers from year to year.

The prospect of better staff accommodation is surely a practical and achievable goal. It presents an opportunity to contribute to the next stage of the development of BMIMC by donating to the Building Fund. All such donations are tax-deductible.

Please use the form on the back page and a special receipt will be returned to you.



A Book of U Janaka Talks

A long-imagined project is coming to fruition—a book of talks by Chanmyay Sayadaw Ashin Janaka Bhivamsa (Sayadaw U Janaka).

In March 1998 Sayadaw conducted a month-long retreat at BMIMC. The talks were recorded and two yogis, Nancy Dodge and John McIntyre, undertook the labour of transcribing the fourteen talks with a view to publishing them.

The transcribed talks existed in draft form for some years before being checked by Sayadaw and corrected and edited by Venerable Ariya Ñāṇi. Nancy Dodge is now



Chanmyay Sayadaw opening the new Chanmyay Vihara in Springfield, Illinois, USA, 2007

readying the book for publication and free distribution. Contributions are invited to help bring this project to fruition—to cover the costs of publication will require about \$4000.

Donations can be made through the Centre. Please state the donation is for the Chanmyay Sayadaw Talks Book.

BMIMC DONATION FORM

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