

Buddha Sāsana

Newsletter of the Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre



Spring & Summer 2012

Editorial

Welcome to the Summer 2012 edition of the BMIMC newsletter. It is a year since the last issue, not because of a reluctance to share our news but because our energies have been taken up with the organisation's ongoing change.

Our new management model seems to be working. In 2010 we decided not to seek another resident manager, recognising the role laid heavy responsibilities on even the most capable person. We wanted a more sustainable and participatory approach, so the management committee decided to distribute these responsibilities across different roles, some performed by staff and some by volunteers. We allowed a new pattern to emerge over our 'transition year' in 2011.

The first change was to create a new position of Centre co-ordinator, paid and part-time, to take over the office manager function and the right person appeared, in the form of Edwina Dawson.

Then early in 2012, Yael Wasserman and Danielle Clarke offered to become residential caretakers from July, living at BMIMC and assisting not only with grounds and maintenance work but other activities such as their talents might allow. We are seeing the benefits of their skills and new energy in areas like marketing and self-retreats. So since July, we have had a staff 'team of three'. [Read more from the team.](#)

Committee members are taking a larger role, especially in the planning and organising of retreats. Marc Allas has taken on the key responsibility of retreat planning while retreat preparation and organisation is now carried out by the new resident caretakers. Thanks to Marc's efforts, the retreat schedule is at full strength and planned almost a year ahead.

We hope this 'distributed management' model will be more sustainable than the past residential manager position. The new model means, however, that operating costs are higher and we are reviewing our approaches to fundraising and income generation. We now have an [on-line donation facility](#) and in October we re-introduced our [Spring Appeal](#). Though a new staff building continues to be a priority, we are drawing on the Building Fund to meet some ongoing maintenance costs.

Of course, we can expect arrangements to keep evolving as more good ideas come along with people willing to pursue them. Volunteers led by Meredith and Don have made great changes in the grounds and gardens following a new plan. Another new proposal is to develop a group of ['Friends of BMIMC'](#) that would strengthen the network of volunteers and supporters and better recognise their contribution. [Read more.](#)

Finally, in November the Centre hosted a Satipatthana Dharma Gathering of lay teachers and long-term students invited by Patrick Kearney to meet, study the sutta and consider the teaching of dharma in the context of contemporary Buddhism. This event has created an agenda for further discussion. The committee be considering whether BMIMC as a well established meditation centre has the capacity to play a larger part in furthering the Australian Buddha Dharma especially in the development of dharma teaching. [Read more.](#)



Sakyamuni Buddha and attendant bodhisattvas (not visible). China, Northern Wei dynasty sculpture, from the Qingzhou 'Lost Buddhas' hoard.

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RESIDENTS' WINTER OF CONTENT

In the last newsletter, we introduced Edwina Dawson who had just taken up the new role of Centre Co-ordinator. Edwina soon proved a most able team of one. Fortune smiled again when in July we accepted Yael and Danielle's offer to become resident caretakers and suddenly there was a team of three staff.

In the short time they have been at the Centre Yael and Danielle have begun to have an impact on how visitors and yogis experience the Centre, in their friendly and welcoming approach. They also bring experience from their Sydney professional careers that is already helping to reshape the way we do things.

Yael here reflects on their first 'winter of content' at BMIMC. May there be many more happy seasons for our new resident caretakers!

(Pictured) Yael, Danielle and Edwina



Danielle and I arrived at the Centre on a Saturday in the middle of July. It was cold, rainy and empty. Perfect! Less than 24 hours before we had both finished our demanding and stressful fulltime jobs in Sydney and we were craving stillness and space. It was wonderful to reconnect with the Centre. We had never been very involved with the BMIMC community but I had been sitting retreats here since 2000 and always felt a deep familiarity with the place the moment I set foot on the property.

It didn't take long to appreciate the affect the conditions at the Centre would have on our practice. Rickety door handles, preparing each morning for the freezing mountain winter, layer upon layer of clothing, scraping the thick frost from the car windscreen and so on.

A week ago these would have been frustrating speed humps on the way to us completing some urgent task. But now we were able to put space around these encounters, slow down a little, actually enjoy the mundaneness and see the charm in things just as they are.

The BMIMC community started to reveal itself over the next few weeks. One by one people would quietly appear, some local, some from further afield, each with their own felt connection to the Centre and colourful stories of the its past. Everyone seemed genuinely happy to see us and we have felt quite overwhelmed by the warmth of welcome and by the kindness and support offered.

Spring arrived with a flurry of activity to usher in the recommencement of retreats after the winter recess bringing with it more new faces, some with the wide eyes of first time meditators and others the comfortable smiles of long time yogis and volunteers. Everyone with their own story, sharing their experience and a common desire to under-



stand the mind and what the Buddha was getting at with the Satipattana teaching.

It is a privilege to be around this and to be supported by such dedicated teachers. And it is wonderful to feel part of such a warm and open community.

I know I can speak for Danielle and Edwina when I say to newcomers and old timers alike, we look forward to seeing you up here again and we wish you all the best in the development of your practice.

Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!

Yael Wasserman
Resident Caretaker

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SUPPORTING BURMESE ORPHANS

In 2009 and 2012, BMIMC made donations to support an orphanage in Burma called Thamaingdaw Dah Tha Nunnery. For some ten years now, Thamaingdaw has provided dozens of children in Burma with a home, food and the ability to attend school. This care is made possible through the generous donations of people from around the world, including Australia.

Thamaingdaw is located in the city of Ta Nyin, around one and half hours drive south of Yangon, Burma. Thamaingdaw is run by two Buddhist nuns and they look after a number of girls from the age of five to high school age. These children are either orphans or their parents can no longer afford to care for them and have given them up. The nuns generally have at least seven children and up to more than 20 in their care. The numbers fluctuate from year to year. Currently they are caring for around 20 girls.

Whilst the girls are in the care of the nuns they usually wear the nuns' robes except for their senior years of high school when they wear the school uniform, though they are not expected to become nuns for life. In the aftermath of the Cyclone Nargis crisis, the non-government organisation, Save the Children, placed a number of children temporarily in the care of Thamaingdaw.

They all live in a very basic timber building with a corrugated iron roof, consisting of one small multi-purpose room with an adjoining kitchen and one smaller room in which the two nuns sleep. The children sleep in the multi-purpose room which serves as their living and dining area and study and prayer room.

At the start of last year the building was connected to electricity, and they have access to running water through an artesian well on their land. As is common in Burma, the nuns and children rely on alms offered by the local people to the nuns for essentials such as rice, oil and coal. They also grow their own vegetables. Thamaingdaw also relies on donations for general expenses like school books, pens and pencils, shoes and reading glasses for the children.

Theresa Baw (a committee member) and her mother and family have been supporting Thamaingdaw for a number of years. They took photographs on their visit in 2009 and 2012. Last year, generous donations helped to pay for the building of a cement water tank for showering; an electrical pump for the artesian well to replace a manual pump; soil fill to prop up the building as there was slippage (due to the land formerly being a rice paddy field); enrolment fees for the local state school; umbrellas for the children to travel to school during the monsoon season; and food. This was made possible through the generosity of Theresa's family and friends, including BMIMC and committee members.

BMIMC's latest donation will contribute to the goal for 2013, which is to raise enough funds to convert the front verandah into a bedroom to accommodate five people, overcoming the cramped conditions where there are now more than twenty people living in the small building, and to build a small alternate verandah at the front for the placing of shoes. Plans also include expanding the kitchen and adding another two toilets to the existing block. Funds are also needed to buy rice, oil and coal which are essential staples for their daily cooking and to pay for nuns robes for the children. To this goal, BMIMC expects to contribute again this year. If you would like to know more or offer a donation, please email the centre who will contact Theresa.



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SATIPATTHANA DHARMA GATHERING

In November, a dharma gathering organised by Patrick Kearney brought together a group of long term students and teachers, some associated with Patrick and others, BMIMC lay teachers and Committee members, with the aim of developing our understanding of **satipaṭṭhāna**.

The gathering combined meditation retreat, sutta study group, workshop and free-wheeling discussion with a continual emphasis on how **satipaṭṭhāna** is presented in the teachings of the Buddha, with reference to but no particular focus on the Mahasi approach. Most found the experience quite intense, like a 'Buddhist encounter group', someone said!

In Patrick's words, the term 'dharma' is meant to convey a double meaning. Dharma indicates the way things are, so **satipaṭṭhāna dharma** refers to the *nature* of **satipaṭṭhāna**, what it is and how it works. Dharma also indicates *our response to* the way things are, so **satipaṭṭhāna dharma** refers to our response to **satipaṭṭhāna**, what we must do about it, whether as students or as teachers.

Patrick indicated that he wished to open up discussion about the role of **satipaṭṭhāna** in contemporary Buddhism, and perhaps question what 'Buddhism' means in contemporary society. What are we, as practitioners and teachers, contributing to the formation of contemporary Australian Buddha Dharma?

The gathering began with a day and night of formal practice. The second day set an agenda and process for discussion of issues in the teaching of **satipaṭṭhāna**. Patrick led the group in a thorough analysis which included a discussion of 'mindfulness' and its many contemporary applications in psychology and other fields. By the fourth day, discussion became more focussed on 'our response' as we were challenged to consider where we stood in relation to contemporary Buddhism and its many manifestations including secular mindfulness training.

Finally, the gathering discussed the potential role of BMIMC in the forming of dharma teachers. There emerged a general view that the BMIMC as an established centre could contribute to the development of a pathway to dharma teaching. It was hoped that there could be further events, including an activity for BMIMC teachers about teaching at the Centre, and the hosting of a second Satipatthana Dharma Gathering with a broad focus, held towards the end of 2013.

There was interest expressed in some form of Community Facilitator Program or perhaps Dedicated Practitioner Program like that of Spirit Rock in the USA. These initiatives would need further research and consultation and the development of proposals for consideration by the BMIMC committee.

Note: Some interesting articles were circulating at the gathering, including a chapter Patrick wrote for the book *Buddhism in Australia. Traditions in change* (Edited by Cristina Rocha & Michelle Barker. Abingdon: Routledge, 2011) that gives an account of the history of insight meditation and how it is developing in contemporary Australia. Other papers included Winton Higgins' 'The Coming of Secular Buddhism' (available at <http://www.globalbuddhism.org>) and Bikkhu Bodhi's 'What does mindfulness really mean? A canonical perspective' in *Contemporary Buddhism* (May 2011). Thanks to Jacqueline for the photographs.



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VOLUNTEERS AND A 'FRIENDS' PROPOSAL

During November events there was some informal discussion among volunteers of the idea of a 'Friends of BMIMC' group like that supporting other not-for-profit organisations. Subsequently, Margie Sampson with the assistance of Yael, developed a draft proposal to be considered at the February management committee meeting.

A 'Friends' group would have two purposes.

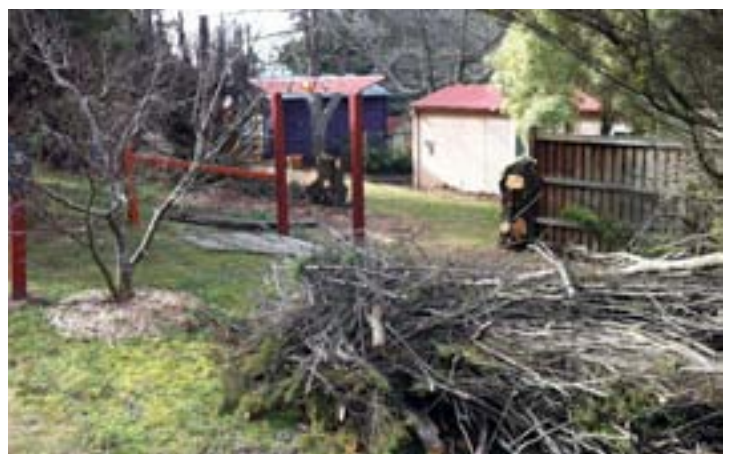
First, it would work as a 'sangha-in-action' connecting people associated with BMIMC through social media, updates and social activities such as bushwalks, dinners, film nights and picnics throughout the year. It would provide a social focus in addition to the several meditation groups currently running and create a supportive dharma-friend network. Many newer yogis do not have the dharma network that more experienced yogis seem to develop over time.

The group would also help people feel a sense of ongoing involvement with the welfare of BMIMC and provide a communication link between management and sangha. It would formalise and strengthen the volunteer network. A strong, connected and involved sangha around the Centre helps staff, managers and the committee feel supported as well, and can offer new ideas and a wider pool of skills meeting all sorts of needs.

Secondly, the 'Friends' could operate as a fund-raising arm for specific projects not financed through the current budget, such as rainwater tanks, solar hot water for the main house and kitchen or bathroom refurbishment. There would be fundraising events extending outside the sangha. These events would give greater focus and direction to fundraising, highlighting achievable financial goals that are usually better subscribed to by supporters. It may also be possible to make more headway with the building program and hold a fundraising drive for, say, the foundations! Skilfully planning these fundraisers can also be fun and help connect the sangha. Some support could also be given annually to projects BMIMC is associated with overseas, such as the [Burmese orphanage](#).

The nature of the proposed group is still to be worked out and needs careful consideration. One suggestion is for some formal link between the Friends and the Centre management committee where the Friends nominate a member or members to the parent body. In legal terms, the Friends could function as a sub-committee of the BMIMC committee with delegated authority to carry out certain functions and activities. This would take care of issues such as incorporation, insurance, bank accounts, tax exemptions and status as a charitable body.

These and other issues will be considered in the next few months when a proposal is considered by the management committee in late February. In the meantime, anyone who is interested can contact Margie Sampson by email at margie@baeliup.nlk.nf after the end of January.



Pictures: The Easter retreat and work on the garden

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NEWS FAR AND NEAR

Medlow Bath sitting group

There is a weekly group meditation at BMIMC in Medlow Bath, usually on Wednesday evenings. The sessions are from 7pm to 8pm and the format is sitting meditation and occasionally a short reading at the end of the sit. There are paths outside for walking meditation if people wish to walk as well as sit.

Several local supporters who are experienced meditators share responsibility for leading the group. For those unfamiliar with the practice, please contact BMIMC to arrange some guidance before the session and stay for a cuppa and chat afterwards.

Sydney group sits

The Sydney meditation group meets weekly at the Life & Balance Centre, Australia Post Building, Level 1, 181A Glebe Point Road, Glebe (entrance from St Johns Road). The group is in recess from mid December to early February each year.

The sessions are from 7pm to 9pm each Friday evening (except long weekends) and although there is no charge for attending, donations are welcome. Arrivals after 7pm finding the door locked, should knock.

The format is 30 minutes sitting, 30 minutes walking, 30 minutes sitting then usually a talk or some discussion. The group is open to anyone who would like to learn how to practise insight meditation. If you are unfamiliar with this type of meditation practice and would like some guidance, please try to arrive a little earlier and let the group leader know.

Four experienced meditators share responsibility for leading the group: Graham Wheeler, Danny Taylor, Michael Dash and Marc Allas. The group now has an informal lending library of dhamma books that is available to anyone who attends the group

on a regular basis.

Canberra has a meditation group associated with the centre. Details of its Sunday nights and other activities can be found on the website, canberainsightmeditationgroup.org.

Beth Steff in the USA

Beth, our resident manager in 2011, has been absorbed in the life of Abhayagiri monastery in California since she returned there in April.

She says that 'Life here continues to nourish, uplift and inspire me, even more as time goes by as my relationships and connections with the residents and the wider support community strengthen and deepen. I am still at times quite amazed and wonderfully surprised by the synchronicity in being here; the deep respect and honor I feel in finally discovering my Dhamma niche and the myriad of teachings and opportunities within practice unfolding moment by moment.

'Be it within a morning Dhamma reflection from a senior monk, a sharing at kitchen clean-up, a visit from our generous regular supporters, an inspiration with a talk, conversation or reading, the metta and gratitude that bubbles up within the heart seems to radiate out like the warmth from a welcome winter fire. I deeply appreciate the very focused attitude which emphasizes that practice is all the time, wherever we find ourselves, being with awareness'.

Tara in India

Tara has sent seasonal greetings to all her friends at BMIMC from Bir, Northern India, where she was waiting to start two days of travel by taxi, plane and taxi again to Lumbini, Nepal, for three weeks before she returns to Bir and then enjoys some holidays. Bir hosts an ecumenical Tibetan Buddhist Centre, The Deer Park Institute, where Tara attended their courses to learn more about Tibetan teachings.

Note: The vision of the Institute in Bir is an ecumenical organisation where lay people can come to study and explore classical Buddhist traditions. Deer Park refers to the place in Sarnath where the Buddha gave his first teachings on the turning of the wheel of dhamma.

The Institute, set up in 2006 by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche, a renowned Buddhist teacher and film maker, is based upon the original Dzongsar Institute in Tibet, with courses taught by masters from all traditions of Buddhism, including the Zen and Shrivakayana traditions of Japan, Thailand, Burma, and elsewhere. It is attempting to be a modern version of the ancient Indian Nalanda University, where scholars, monks, and lay people applied themselves to the study of Buddhist and Indian Philosophy.

Further information can be found on the Deer Park website, at deerpark.in or siddharthasintent.org.



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FUNDRAISING

A Spring Appeal

Our annual appeal for donations to the Building Fund was launched a good deal later than Vesak this year. We held a Spring Appeal with the theme of renovation and renewal.

In past years, our fundraising has been directed to further developing the facilities of Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre. A decade ago, we raised sufficient funds to create a new standard of accommodation, and all have benefitted from this improvement.

More recently, we have set our sights on raising the quality of staff accommodation. We highlighted this in our 2011 Vesak appeal, knowing it would take some years to amass the necessary resources and establish the right conditions for work to start. Though a new building is still our goal, the right time awaits.



In the last year some necessary repairs and maintenance have made calls upon the reserves in the Building Fund—such as replacing parts of the house central heating (\$6,400) and a pest inspection (\$2,000).

Sometimes these calls are of an exceptional kind. In late 2011 a fierce storm brought down huge pine trees on the property, fortunately without harming anyone or damaging buildings. However, there have been costs in making the remaining trees safe (\$2,200).

We offer you an opportunity to replenish the building fund and help us garner the resources for the future building of the staff accommodation. Your donation is tax-deductible and as usual a special receipt will be issued.

Donating Online

We are now able to accept donations to the Centre's building fund via our website. If you would like to try giving online, go to the BMIMC home page and follow the links. It is not too late to contribute to the Spring Appeal (see above).

The Appeal has so far raised nearly \$7000 so many thanks to those who were able to give. The money will go towards some long overdue building improvements and maintenance.

Thanks to Yael Wasserman for organising the online donation facility and finessing the Appeal. Yael brings his

... and Spring generosity

Thanks to everyone who so joyfully volunteered their time to help at the Centre over the past few months.

Our Spring Dhamma Service day was a day well spent with more native planting and weed control. Many people have said the grounds have never looked better. To our volunteer cooks, the rock stars of dhamma service, we thank you for the long hours in the kitchen and the commitment to providing beautiful meals to yogis and staff.

We should not forget the yogi jobs which help keep the retreats ticking along far more than you might realise—thank you yogis for rolling up your sleeves and helping out.

A special mention must be made of Daniela de Angelis for the many hours she spent painting the dhamma hall at her own considerable expense. This is possibly the first time the hall has been painted since its construction in the early

nineties and it has no doubt extended its lifetime by many years. Thank you Daniela.



We're now on Facebook

We launched a Facebook Page in October, apparently to a good reception judging by the fact that over a hundred people joined in the first two weeks. We are conscious that many of you do not use, nor intend to use Facebook. The good news is you don't need to be "on" Facebook to see our Facebook page. Just go to the BMIMC home page, click on the blue button and you will be able to see the Facebook activity with complete anonymity.

