

Buddha Sāsana

Newsletter of Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre



SATIPATTHANA DHARMA GATHERING

This gathering led by Patrick Kearney brought together a group of long term students and teachers, some associated with Patrick and some BMIMC lay teachers and Committee members with the aim of developing our understanding of satipatthana.

The gathering, combined meditation retreat, sutta study group, workshop and with free-wheeling discussion with a continual emphasis on how satipatthana is presented in the teachings of the Buddha, with no particular focus on rather than on the Mahasi approach. Most found it quite intense, like a 'Buddhist encounter group', someone (Danny) said!

In Patrick's words, the term 'dharma' is meant to convey a double meaning. Dharma indicates the way things are, so satipatthana dharma refers to the *nature* of satipatthana, what it is and how it works. Dharma also indicates *our response to* the way things are, so satipatthana dharma refers to our response to satipatthana, 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 satipatthana 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 satipatthana. Patrick led the group in a thorough analysis of satipatthana 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 to satipatthana' 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 consensus that the BMIMC as an established centre, could contribute to the development of a pathway to dharma teaching. This would include an event limited to BMIMC about teaching at the centre, and hosting a second Satipatthana Dharma Gathering with a similar broad focus held towards the end of 2103.

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 proposals would need further research and consultation and the development of a proposal to be considered by the BMIMC committee.

Note: Some interesting articles were tabled at the meeting, 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. Another was Winton Higgins' 'The Coming of Secular Buddhism' (available at <http://www.globalbuddhism.org>) and Bhikhu Bodhi's 'What does mindfulness really mean? A canonical perspective' in *Contemporary Buddhism* (May 2011).

