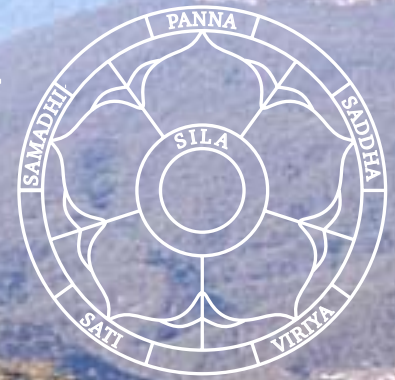


Buddha Sāsana



Newsletter of the Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre

The edge of certainty

by Patrick Kearney
Resident teacher

Our practice is to clarify the nature of our own experience as it arises now, in this present moment. We are not concerned with thoughts of past or future, gain or loss, but only with immediacy, the clarification of *this*, *now*. The practice of immediacy is designed to stimulate wisdom, to develop an ability to see and understand the reality of things as they present themselves in this present moment.

The cultivation of wisdom is fuelled by aspiration. Feeling our inadequacy, and sensing there is a way to move beyond it, we aspire to some kind of transformation we call “enlightenment,” a transformation which is necessarily located in the future, the not-yet-experienced. We aspire to something better, and are moved, drawn along, by our aspiration. Aspiration is inherently dynamic, kept alive by a combination of passionate desire and frustration. The more we are moved by our ideals, the more we become aware of the gap between who we are now and who we aspire one day to become. As we mature in the practice, as we “progress,”

we gain a degree of serenity and insight, but if our aspirations are passionate, if they retain their capacity to move us, we remain acutely aware of our failures to live up to them. Our aspiration is like the horizon which beckons us with the promise of something better than this, but at which we never arrive. Aspiration keeps drawing us on, into the unknown which is the future.

This dynamic of transformation and aspiration is also bound up with fear. If we want transformation then we want something radically new, something we as yet know nothing about. We aspire to a form of life that is now inaccessible to us, and in moving toward it are confronted by the unknown. Our bedrock is the experience we gain in our practice. This is what we know, what we can clearly see. But our vision is necessarily limited. There is always a horizon beyond which we cannot see. We know as far as our eye of practice has revealed, but the rest is darkness.

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The future, the not-yet-experienced, is mystery. We seek to domesticate the future by projecting our present experience into it. This is the future we anticipate and plan for, the future for which “I” plan to be around, the future that can be taken care of by our mortgage. This future is the self, projected forwards. When,



for example, we are caught in an emotional trap we are familiar with from long experience, we are easily convinced that it will always be like this. Caught in habitual patterns of reaction, we identify with them, precisely because they are habits. They solidify our sense of self, the one who endures throughout time, who will be here for the future. Sometimes we think of our self enduring without change - "I will always be like this." Sometimes we think of our self changing over time - "One day, things will be better." But always the future of the self remains something projected from the past, through the present, and into a realm whose broad outlines can be anticipated. It can be anticipated because it is a projection of my self through time. This "I" experienced in the present will be the same "I" in the future.

But in its essence, the future is unforeseeable, absolutely unknown. No plans can be made for it, and it always catches us by surprise, off balance. This aspect of the future is entirely beyond our control, a dark realm beyond the manageable. Here we are always blind, reduced to groping our way. This future carries a great risk, for we do not know what will happen or who will come knocking. And our practice of *vipassanā* meditation occurs on the cusp of present and future, the point where this present moment moves into the unknown future, the edge of certainty.

The edge of certainty is characterised by fear, as we hang on to the familiar, even the painful familiar, because we find a security within it. Living as we normally do in the illusion of certainty, we are locked into that which is safe and clearly defined. When we open to the practice, we ride the present into the unknown, into the perpetually new. And the *vipassanā* meditator goes along for the ride, for we are always

positioning ourselves at the point where the old ends and the new begins. And so we open ourselves to the full depth of human possibility, riding waves of impermanence across an ocean of emptiness.

We push forward the boundaries of the known by investigation. At any given moment - at this moment - we ask, "What is this?" We ask because we are not sure. We think we know, but we don't yet, and seek to clarify the matter. Our clarity is directly opposed by forgetfulness, as we forget what we are doing and our attention slides off this present experience into distraction, which is always familiar and reassuring in its confirmation of our own reality and solidity. Returning to the immediacy of this experience, now, we learn to abandon our old, comfortable way of doing things in favour of a living relationship to the dynamic of the present moment, which is already changing into something else, something as yet unknown.

As we move across the border into the unknown, we are exposed to danger. We are opened into a new realm of experiences, some of them painful and threatening.



In the deep quiet of the mind, that which we normally seek to suppress, which we want to remain unknown, jumps up and ambushes us. The practice is dangerous. We may become unhinged by the waves of the unwelcome real which wash over us, and we feel acutely exposed as we abandon the security of the known for that which we don't know. But we are pushed forward by the passion of our aspiration, which will not let us rest in the security of the known.

To cross the boundary of the known requires that we live in radical uncertainty, and the journey from certainty to radical uncertainty is the journey from self to not-self. The path to not-self is through pain (*dukkha*), which is bound up with our desires for certainty and predicability and control. When these desires are frustrated, and we are forced to admit that their frustration is inevitable, then we can surrender into our terror and our passion, abandoning both. Then we enter into the realm of not-self - where we were always located, of course, but just not knowing, because of our fear of letting go of the secure and the familiar and the apparently controllable.

How can we be confident of our journey into the unknown? This is the area of faith (*saddhā*) and surrender. Our own personal experience is necessarily limited; always necessarily limited. If we are not willing to surrender to an understanding greater than our own, then we must fall back on our limited experience and imagination, denying ourselves the possibility of transformation into what we cannot now even imagine.

While the future is a mystery, it is a mystery already explored and mapped by the tradition, the accumulated experiences of generations, beginning with the Buddha himself. The Buddha provides us with a path, and "path" means that someone else



EVAM ME SUTTAṀ This is how I heard it

A six week course on the Buddha's teachings with Patrick Kearney

The central teaching of all the buddhas is dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). Dependent arising reveals every “thing” that we experience, including the one who does the experiencing, to be an event, an empty phenomenon that comes into existence because of something other than itself, and that goes out of existence because of something other than itself. Existence is radically contingent. The very reading of this sentence is contingent, arising and ceasing in dependence on conditions other than itself.

In this course we will read *suttas* which clarify or illustrate the workings of dependent arising. We will examine how the *suttas* themselves arise and cease dependently, how the readers of these *suttas* arise and cease dependently, and how our reading of them arises and ceases dependently.

The course will take place over six weeks. The first class will revise aspects of the last *evam me suttaṃ* course, where we examined the oral structures of the *suttas*, and succeeding classes will apply this understanding to the doctrine of dependent arising, and apply the doctrine of dependent arising to this understanding.

Times: Tuesdays 2 April to 7 May, 7 - 9 p.m.

Venue: The Buddhist Library and Meditation Centre,
90 - 92 Church Street, Camperdown.

Cost: \$75, or \$50 concession.

Information & bookings: Call the Buddhist Library on 02 9519 6054; or fax 02 9519 3402; or email info@buddhistlibrary.com.au

has walked into the unknown that confronts us, so we know the destination is possible. The tradition points us toward the not-yet-experienced. It introduces us to the very idea of “enlightenment,” the very possibility of a path, and gives these notions their content. The tradition maps our present, inadequate condition - our *dukkha* - and reveals the exemplar and guide who shows us the way - the Buddha. It gives us our sense of direction, saying *this* way is good, but *that* way won't work. The Buddha presents us with a choice between the skilful and the unskilful, the wholesome and the unwholesome, his rhetoric making clear that it would be better to choose the skilful and the

wholesome. Try this, he says, and see what happens. The tradition provides us with the “this” we are to try, and the criteria of success and failure that show us how to assess what happens. So at some point we must surrender to the map being offered, for otherwise we will never attempt the journey to the destination being offered.

The path requires love and faith. To love, we must trust. We must leap beyond certainty, and accept radical risk. When I am *in* love, I know it; but *to* love requires an act of faith, a commitment to an unknown and radically unknowable future, where I surrender control because the locus of control has passed beyond

myself to something broader, to myself-&-other in relationship. So the path begins with passion, returns to the understanding of *this*, and matures with love and faith. The practice embraces all these and more, for once freed of the limitations of who we think we are its boundaries are immeasurable.

Beyond the Centre

Patrick's away-from-home teaching schedule



SERENE & CLEAR

THE BUDDHA'S WAY OF MEDITATION

This is a six week course at the Buddhist Library which will introduce the student to Buddhist meditation in both its serenity (*samatha*) and clarity (*vipassanā*) aspects. Serenity is the mind's deep rest in the midst of everyday life. Clarity is the mind's deep seeing into the nature of everyday life. We will explore standing, walking and sitting meditation, how to develop a firm and comfortable posture for meditation, and the fundamental theory that guides the practice. There will be ample opportunity for discussion about the practice and how it is applied in daily life.

When: Wednesdays 21 August to 25 September, 7 - 9 p.m.

Where: The Buddhist Library and Meditation Centre, 90 - 92 Church Street, Camperdown.

Cost: \$75, or \$50 concession.

Information & bookings: Call the Buddhist Library on 02 9519 6054; or fax 02 9519 3402; or email info@buddhistlibrary.com.au

MINDFULNESS WEEKENDS - LISMORE

The Kuan Yin Meditation Centre in Lismore is hosting two non-residential weekend retreats, designed for beginning and experienced meditators. Each retreat will involve periods of sitting and walking meditation, a dharma talk in the middle of the day, and will end with a group discussion.

When: 18 - 19 May & 16 - 17 November

Cost: \$10 course fee and *dāna*.

Information & bookings: Contact Sonya Nourse at sonyanourse@hotmail.com

NORTH COAST RETREAT

This is a residential insight meditation retreat conducted at Byron Bay.

When: 27 September - 5 October

Cost: To be advised.

Information & bookings: Contact Sonya Nourse at sonyanourse@hotmail.com

Burning!

*From Ādittapariyāya Sutta,
Saṃyutta Nikāya 35*

Everything is burning. And what is "everything" that is burning? The eye, forms, eye-consciousness, eye-contact, and whatever feeling - pleasant, painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant - arises with eye-contact is burning. Burning with the fire of passion, of hatred, of delusion; burning with birth, ageing, and death; with sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair.



The ear is burning, the nose, the tongue, the body, the mind is burning. Burning with the fire of passion, of hatred, of delusion; burning with birth, ageing, and death; with sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair.

Seeing in this way, the well trained noble student is disenchanted with the eye, with forms, with eye-consciousness, with eye-contact, and with whatever feeling - pleasant, painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant - arises with eye-contact. Being disenchanted his passion fades, and through the fading of passion he is liberated. He is disenchanted with the ear, with the nose, with the tongue, with the body, with the mind. Being disenchanted his passion fades, and through the fading of passion he is liberated.

Ādittapariyāya Sutta is the Buddha's third discourse, delivered to the three Kassapa brothers and their thousand students. They were *jaṭila* (matted hair) ascetics who worshipped *agni*, the sacred fire. The Buddha taught them that all experience is burning, burning with obsession, restlessness, discontent and confusion. These fires of the heart and mind, like those that have ravaged the Blue Mountains and beyond, have the capacity to cause "sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair" among those caught in their path.

KALYANAMITTA STUDY GROUP

Ananda to the Buddha: Spiritual friendship is half the holy life

Buddha to Ananda: No, Ananda, no, it is the whole of the holy life

What are some of the challenges we encounter in trying to live a spiritually-informed life, and how can we support each other in this process?

The course aims to provide a forum for informal discussion of how we integrate the practice into our daily lives. Each session will be structured around a theme, with time to explore individual approaches to practice within a supportive group setting. It will be facilitated by Jill, but otherwise is intended to be a group-led open discussion of relevant practice issues. It is more suitable for people who already have a regular meditation practice.

At the time of writing we are in the middle of a very successful pilot course which has been running over December / January with ten participants. It is intended that these groups will continue throughout the year to provide ongoing support for people interested in broadening their practice through developing spiritual friendship.

Dates: Thursdays 28 February to 11 April (excluding Easter 28 March)

Time: 7 - 8:30 p.m.

Venue: Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre

Cost: \$30 for six sessions (to cover costs of tea and coffee, photocopying etc)

Information & bookings: Call the Centre on 4788 1024 or email bmimc@mountains.net.au



Bhikkhuni Kusuma with a yogi on her recent visit to BMIMC

Bhikkhuni Kusuma

Bhikkhuni's brief visit to the Centre in October this year was very well received. She inspired and entertained many with her warm presence and deep experiential knowledge of the dharma. In addition to leading a one day workshop and engaging in many dharma discussions, she found time to share a delicious Sri Lankan meal with staff, Committee members and locals. We hope that Bhikkhuni will be able to visit the Centre again for a longer period, in winter 2003.

Bhikkhuni is currently organising the finishing stages of construction of her new Buddhist education and meditation centre in Gonapola, Sri Lanka, which should be completed soon. When it is, she would be delighted to have meditators from Australia visit her there. For more information, please contact Jill at the Centre



Old and new staff - l to r: Ian Bett, assistant manager, Mary-Ann Sharrock, assistant manager (back to camera), David Smith former manager, with yogis (photo courtesy of U Hla Maung)

Staff wanted

Our current assistants, Ian and Mary-Ann, are planning to travel overseas in May 2002, so we will soon be looking for one new assistant to help us manage the Centre over winter and beyond. We are looking for an experienced meditator who is committed to *dhamma* service, and has some combination of the following skills: small office administration (including familiarity with computers); cooking and house-keeping; building and grounds maintenance. They should be able to relate to people from diverse backgrounds and be comfortable living in a small meditation community of 3-4 people. Staff receive a small stipend in addition to full board and accommodation, and a car allowance if they are able to provide their own vehicle.

For more information contact Jill Shepherd on (02) 4788 1024 or email bmimc@mountains.net.au, or for further information about the Centre visit our website, www.buddhanet.net/bmimc.htm

Now Building! A major appeal

The Management Committee

Our previous newsletters have outlined plans to build new student accommodation and facilities. This is possible because of the ‘founding generosity’ of earlier years which secured the adjoining land for this future building program. Right now, thanks largely to the generosity of a single anonymous sponsor, we have enough money to build one *nine-bedroom accommodation block*. Since our last newsletter giving details of the development plans, we have had a very good response to our request for donations to the Building Fund. Thank you to all those who gave in this way.

Such has been the generosity of supporters that we are considering whether it might be possible to build the second of the two accommodation blocks in this first round of construction. If we can continue to raise funds over the next two months, it may be possible to build the *seven-bedroom block* at the same time. It would be cheaper to build both buildings at once, and we would then be able to have one block for women and one for men. Also, there is a high level of commitment by local supporters with building skills to donate much of the finishing work beyond ‘lock-up’ stage, which encourages us to undertake a major building effort now.

We are now going all out to try to raise the money for the second block before March 2002. The target is \$70,000. We are asking for major sponsorship, offering people the opportunity to ‘buy’ a single room for \$10, 000. The donation - by an individual or group - would be identified by a small plaque indicating the donor or whoever the donor might want to commemorate in this way.

For the many among us whose budgets will not stretch to giving a whole room, it is possible to donate smaller parts of the building. Many fixtures and fittings are required besides basic building materials. If you can afford an item from the list below we will put your donation towards its purchase. We have included some examples of items required, with approximate costs, to give you an indication of what we need. Of course this is not a complete list, so if there is an item which you would particularly like to donate towards, please add it to the list below. Thank you for your consideration.



Now Building! Appeal

All donations to the Building Fund are tax deductible. A special receipt will be sent to you.

Please make cheques/money orders payable to *BMIMC Building Fund* and mail them to the Centre with this form. For credit card payments, please mail or fax this form to the Centre.

*If you would like to sponsor the construction of a single room in commemoration of a teacher, friend or relative, please contact the Centre to discuss the wording of the plaque.

Cost of item to be donated

Single room*	\$10,000
Wiring	\$5,000
Plumbing	\$5,000
Shower unit	\$1,500
Radiator	\$500
External door	\$400
Toilet	\$300
Washbasin	\$200
Door handle set	\$150
Tap	\$100
Powerpoint	\$50
Plasterboard sheet	\$50
Light fitting	\$10
Coat hook	\$5
Other.....	\$?...

Authorisation to debit my credit card:

- Bankcard
 Visa
 Mastercard

Card No :

Cardholder Name:

Expiry date:

Signature

Amount \$

Donor address:

Phone number:

Around the Centre

by Jill Shepherd
Manager

Happy New Year! Thanks to all the people who called or e-mailed to find out how we were faring during the recent bushfires. We have been very fortunate to have been barely affected by them, apart from a small powercut one morning. Elsewhere in the Mountains and NSW people were not so lucky of course and we wish them a quick return to normal life.



White dot helicopter in smoke cloud, Bullaburra (photo courtesy of John McIntyre)

During the recent heat and drought it seemed quite incongruous to be working on getting the new central-heating system installed in the meditation hall. But that is what has been happening - ground has been broken on our new building project! Just before Christmas, we had a major services trench installed down the middle of the site which brings mains gas down to the meditation hall for the new heating system. The same trench also contains water and electrical conduits for the new development, and represents a significant milestone in terms of

getting the infrastructure for the new buildings under way.

As a result of this work, the meditation hall now has an electronically-programmable, gas-fired radiant heating system. Unfortunately it was installed just in time for bush-fire season, so we haven't yet had a chance to test it properly. It should make a big difference though, both to comfort in the hall and to our electricity bills as we head into the cooler weather.

Currently the January retreat is in progress with a full house, and people are requesting to stay on longer rather than leaving earlier. Besides January, all of our summer retreats have been very well-attended and also very well supported by cooks and kitchen assistants. A big thank you to all who have helped out in this way. Sayādaw U Lakkhaṇa's retreat in particular was generously sponsored by members of the Burmese community and other individuals. In recognition of this support we are able to reduce the cost of Sayādaw's next retreat, in November, to two thirds of its usual cost. As we have been receiving more support from donations and other kinds of assistance over the last year, we are experimenting with offering more *dāna* events in future. We



Sayadaw U Lakkhaṇa receiving dana during his recent retreat (photo courtesy of U Hla Maung)

are running a *dāna* only nine day retreat with Sayādaw U Paññāsāmi in March, and in July, instead of closing the Centre for winter, we are planning to run a self-retreat for experienced meditators during all or part of July. Patrick will be available to give interviews for those who would like them, but otherwise there will be no formal structure to the retreat. It is intended that the day-to-day running of the Centre will be shared by the retreatants, so that the management staff may also have the opportunity to sit at this time.

Other experiments that we have been developing include the new Kalyanamitta study group, for experienced meditators who are interested in developing spiritual friendship as a means to support their practice. Just before Christmas we began a pilot group with ten people, and this has developed into an entertaining and informative discussion group. The feedback so far is that this could develop into an ongoing series of sessions throughout the year, so if you're interested in joining the next series, please contact us for more information.

If there are any other kinds of retreats or study groups which you'd be interested in attending at the Centre, please let us know and we'll see whether it would be feasible to run them at some stage in the future.

INFORMATION 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.

Name

Address

I would like to make a donation of \$ to the Building Fund General fund

Donations to the Building Fund are tax deductible

Authorisation to debit my credit card:

Bankcard Visa M'card Card No

Cardholder Name Expiry date /

Signature

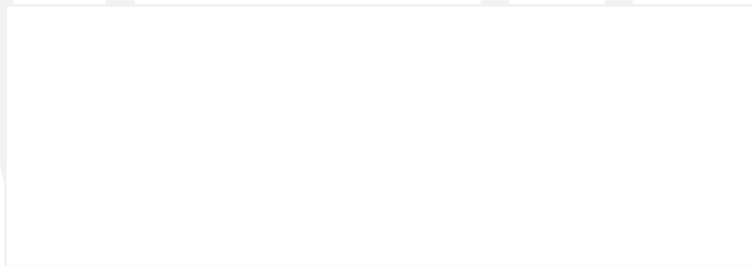
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The Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre is a non-profit organisation owned and managed by the Buddha Sāsana Association of Australia.

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