Ajahn Brahm turns 60

Celebrating the life and service of a great teacher

When the committee members of the Buddhist Society of Western Australia (BSWA) were told that Ajahn Brahm would be turning 60 this year, Ajahn Brahm with great humility said he did not want anything special done. However, the committee members felt that a one day birthday celebration was not enough for our beloved teacher. So, they planned a two day event marking his birthday - a commemorative book launch and his birthday celebration.

Book Launch - 6 August 2011

On the evening of 6 August 2011, the Jhana Grove Meditation Retreat Centre situated in Serpentine, Western Australia was filled with guests from overseas, particularly from Malaysia and Singapore. They were there for a special purpose - to celebrate the 60th Birthday of Ajahn Brahmavamso, better known as Ajahn Brahm.

Members of the Sangha and lay community arrived by 4:30pm in the evening. There were around 60 people from both the Buddhist Fellowship of Singapore and Buddhist Gem Fellowship of Malaysia there, waiting for Ajahn Brahm to arrive. In addition to friends, volunteers and supporters attending this event, the BSWA committee also got Ajahn Brahm's brother Tony Betts and his wife Patricia Betts to fly to Perth to surprise him on his birthday.

Ajahn Brahm arrived to be greeted by his brother and many well wishers. He was happy to see us all there but he took it all in his stride.

As a token of gratitude for what Ajahn Brahm has contributed to Buddhism in Western Australia and around the world, BSWA compiled and printed a commemorative book entitled "Emptiness & Stillness – A tribute to Venerable Ajahn Brahmavamso on the occasion of his 60th birthday". Both Ajahn Brahm and his brother were autographing the book for all the people there.

The event wound down after the speeches and book signing. While this was a low key event, the BSWA committee had another thing planned for the next day birthday celebration!

Birthday Celebration

7 August 2011

On the morning of 7 August 2011, close to 1,000 people were at the Jhana Grove Meditation Centre to celebrate Ajahn Brahm’s 60th Birthday. The organisers were surprised at such a large turnout, but everything went smoothly.

Many Dhamma practitioners, Sangha members, lay supporters, friends and family were all there to show deep respect for Ajahn Brahm and his contribution to the Dhamma and them personally. The large turnout was comprised of dignitaries such as Mr. Phallop Thaiarry who is the Secretary General of World Fellowship of Buddhists, members of the Buddhist Fellowship of Singapore, the Buddhist Gem Fellowship from Malaysia, members of other Buddhist societies, the Sri Lankan, Burmese, and Thai communities.

The morning started with the BSWA Choir singing devotional Buddhist songs and a happy birthday song to Ajahn Brahm. Ajahn Brahm welcomed everyone for coming and they then held Dana for all the Bhikkhus present there.

The official part of the birthday celebration started at Midday. The president of the Buddhist Society of Western Australia (BSWA) welcomed everyone for coming to celebrate this special day. Mr Phallop Thaiarry, representing the King of Thailand, presented a golden statue to Bodhinyana Monastery. He also read a letter from one of the
Thai Somdets, congratulating Ajahn Brahm on his birthday and wishing him well. Both the gift of a Buddha Statue from the King of Thailand and kind words of the Somdet was very significant as it shows that Ajahn Brahm is held in good regard in Thailand.

After the presentation by Mr Thaiarry, the Buddhist Fellowship of Singapore showed a video presentation from their members and their children who could not attend. They all wished Ajahn Brahm a happy birthday. Angie Monksfield then presented a cheque of $60,000, with the request that half of the money should be spent on web services to help spread the Buddha's teachings around the world.

The audience were then regaled with a song specially composed for Ajahn Brahm's birthday. This song was performed by Datuk Dr Victor Wee from the Buddhist Gem Fellowship, Malaysia. This was followed by a traditional Thai dance performed by several Thai dancers.

To end the celebration of his birthday, Ajahn Brahm gave everyone there a precious gift, the gift of Dhamma. He gave a talk to everyone who attended. Every attendee was also given a take away present of the complimentary commemorative book.

The respect that people had there for Ajahn Brahm was evident. It was a great and meaningful birthday for an important Buddhist visionary and teacher who has contributed greatly to the Dhamma as well as encourage meaningful dialogue between different religious groups within Australia.

The BSWA committee organised a fund raiser dinner to collect funds for the building of the Sala building at Dhammasara Nun's monastery. The dinner was held at the Dusit Thai restaurant in Northbridge, Western Australia on 25 July 2011. The dinner was themed "A night to remember", and it was a very memorable night.

The guests arrived very early for a 6:30pm start. Rowanne entertained the guests with a her beautiful musical rendering on the harp. The restaurant was packed to the rafters, filling up most of the tables there. The number of people who turned up to contribute towards the building of the Sala building was heart-warming.

The event went into full swing when Ajahn Brahm arrived. He started the night with his usual sense of humour. The audience were stitching with laughter. His jokes were not only funny but also insightful. Ajahn Brahm does not tell jokes for the sake of telling jokes, but for a purpose.

After opening with his jokes, Ajahn Brahm talked about how he couldn't rest when there was something missing in Buddhism, namely women equity. For a long time, there were no Buddhist Bhikkhunis in the Theravadan tradition as their order died out a long time ago. It seemed that half of Buddhism was missing. Something needed to be done to allow women to become fully ordained nuns again. This is what Dhammasara Nuns Monastery was build for, towards having Bhikkhunis practise the Dhamma equally with their male counterparts around the world.

As Dhammasara is growing, there is a need for a new Sala building to cater for the continually expanding numbers of lay and monastic Buddhists there. Ven. Nirodha showed the model for the planned Sala building. She thanked all who were there for their support of Dhammasara Monastery. She also gave an open invitation for everyone to come and visit Dhammasara Monastery. As we are all one Dhamma family, we will always be welcome there.

Ven Hasapana made the point to all the women in the audience that their daughters might not become nuns, but if they ever wanted to, they can now do so in Perth.

The auction went into full swing after dinner. The bids were coming in hard and fast for the items on auction, which were kindly donated by both the monastics and lay community for this night. The night did not end after the auction, as the guests bought raffle tickets. The winners got some exciting prices, including a holiday trip for 2.

The night was really something to remember about. It was a night filled with good food, good people and all for a good cause. The proceeds of the night brought in $30,574.70. The BSWA committee would like to thank everyone for their support and kind donations, whether monetary, time or other resources, for making this a night to remember.

The tagline for this night was "The best of Ajahn Brahm". However, this night showed the BEST of all of us. It showed that we, the lay Buddhist community, have big hearts and are supportive of the Dhamma. Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!
Sangha Activities

In the lead up to the rains retreat there were a few activities. The big one was the Australian Sangha Association annual general meeting, held at Jhana Grove on the 8th of June.

About 40 monks and nuns from many traditions, from all over the country, gathered together to talk about the future of Buddhism in Australia. It was a fascinating day with many hot topics discussed. Several Sangha members were astonished at the quantity of dana provided by the lay people that day.

Ajahn Brahm's Travels

Ajahn Brahm led a retreat in Phuket for the Singapore Buddhist Fellowship from the 18th to the 26th of June. There were quite a few things competing with the meditation hall: the health spa down the road for one!

On the way back from Phuket, Ajahn Brahm visited Bangkok where he gave an anniversary talk at the Oriental Hotel, at the World Fellowship of Buddhists and briefly met with Somdet Buddhajahn and another Somdet, two highly placed members of the Thai Sangha.

Just before the beginning of the rains retreat, on the 11th of July, with just a few hours notice, Ajahn flew to Singapore to attend the funeral of the husband of one of the major sponsors for Jhana Grove. It was a great display of gratitude on his behalf.

As usual, during the rains retreat the Sangha travel little, if at all. However, Ajahn Brahm did take the time to give a keynote talk at the conference of the Australian Association of Buddhist Counsellors and Therapists. This was held in Sydney on the 13th and 14th of August.

Comings and Goings

Two old faces turned up for the rains retreat. Ven. Nitho returned from Norway on the 3rd of July and Ven. Cittapalo arrived back from Germany on the 8th of July. We ordained anagarika Reuven as Samanera Upasama on the 6th of July. Another 4 monks of various nationalities and place of ordination arrived, giving us a full house of 21 monks for the rains.

As well as the large numbers of monks staying, one Bhikkhuni and several lay folk are staying at Jhana Grove for the rains. Ajahn has to work very hard to teach everybody! Taking the allowance to travel for 7 days, Phra Woon from Thailand visited us for a few days to attend Ajahn's birthday party. Demand for ordination is very high, with 4 men wanting to become anagarikas after the rains retreat, and other told they will have to wait for a place to become available.

Building and Maintenance

There were a few odd jobs to do before the rains retreat. We did some plumbing work to increase the rain water catchment in the kutis. With all roofing areas providing run off into the rain water tanks, they fill up very fast now. A major burn-off took place, incinerating many tonnes of sticks, logs and branches that we had gathered over the past year. The renovations of the male guest quarters are complete and work has been done to upgrade the bathroom facilities in the ladies quarters.

We have had enough rain now to fill the dams, and almost completely fill the rainwater tanks. A new pump and solar panel to pump dam water to the top of the hill has been installed. Finally, our monastery cat, "Hammer", had surgery to remove a tumour in her nose. This was unsuccessful. However, she is quite comfortable and is getting a lot of attention from the monks and lay folk.
Within the past five years, Ajahn Brahm has become a household name in Sri Lanka where he previously remained unknown to the Buddhist populace. From being just a meditation teacher from Australia, Ajahn Brahm is now known in Sri Lanka as a charming person – simple, friendly and powerful.

He is held in such high esteem in this island nation that the president of Sri Lanka would invite Ajahn Brahm for morning alms during his visits.

During Ajahn Brahm’s visit to Sri Lanka in January this year, he carried out a nine-day meditation retreat which chiefly involved monks, nuns and laity in the area of Bandarawela (This was reported in the Autumn 2011 issue of Enlightened Times).

When it became public knowledge among those in the ‘Ajahn Brahm Sri Lanka Society’, they arranged the necessary preparations for the event months ahead of time and his name elicited much excitement. Everyone, from the Sangha to laity including local officials and military, turned out to help organise the venue and provide the sound system, mats and blankets for the participants.

During January Duruthu (full moon day), some 7000 devotees were involved in a full day programme, run at the BMICH and for many that came to listen to Ajahn Brahm’s wisdom, this was a virgin experience. Whilst there, he was invited to perform Poya day Dhamma sermon, which was televised so that some eight million viewers could share his wisdom.

Besides the laity and Sangha, Ajahn Brahm has also attracted the interest of the corporate sector. He gave the keynote address at the Buddhist Business Forum as part of the 60th anniversary celebrations of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Colombo. He had many requests from corporate officials to arrange discussions during his visit.

The Sri Lanka Tourist Board discussed the success Ajahn's visit had, and promotes the idea of a 'Buddhist Hotel' whereby frequent meditation sessions can be held.

However, people can still access his teachings at their own homes. Ajahn Brahm’s talks are available in VCD and DVD formats at reasonable prices by Dharmavahini Foundation. His Friday talks in Perth are often broadcast on YouTube on "The Buddhist" channel.

Two-day meditation programmes are arranged by the Ajahn Brahm Sri Lanka Society at the BMICH on a monthly basis to attract meditators who find his style easy to follow.

The popularity of Ajahn Brahm's teachings in Sri Lanka show that he has a big impact in the lives of the Sri Lankan people. May their practise in the Dhamma grow even more through his teachings.

Sourced from: Sri Lanka Sunday Times, 7th August 2011 entitled "Ajahn Brahm – now a household name in Sri Lanka".

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New Office Administrator appointed

After a rigorous selection process, the Buddhist Society of WA is pleased to announce the appointment of Michael Dove as the new Office Administrator.

Michael has been a regular and highly valued contributor to BSWA as a volunteer in recent years, having worked on the desk of the Dhammaloka Library, served as Assistant Secretary on the committee, and managed the Audio Visual team which records and publishes our Dhamma talks on the web.

The committee and members of BSWA are looking forward to having dealings with Michael in his new role as Office Administrator.
Community

There are eight of us spending the rains at Dhammasara Monastery. In addition to our regular monastic community, Dulani Wijeratne from Melbourne and Nadene Ng from Malaysia joined us.

We were delighted when Nadene requested to ordain as an anagarika. We hope to have the ceremony on the 18th of September.

Anagarika Kemanthi's Samaneri ordination will be on Sunday the 30th of October. This ceremony will be held at Dhammasara Nuns Monastery and this will be the first time the land will be blessed with a going forth ceremony. All are welcome to attend this auspicious ceremony. Please arrive by 2 pm for a 2:30 start.

Activities

Our rains retreat programme has been simple, giving us the opportunity to spend time deepening our practice in solitude. There have been weekly vinaya classes, a sutta-based dhamma talk, and fortnightly we make our way to Bodhinyana for Ajahn Brahm's dynamic rains retreat talks. The community also had a two-week personal retreat in complete seclusion.

We have had the rare privilege of two stupas being consecrated simultaneously at Dhammasara, which marked a historic moment. Six relic chambers (3 per Stupa) were enshrined with relics of the Lord Buddha and many Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni Arahantas. This was done ceremonially following the ancient tradition culminating with Ajahn Brahm consecrating the top most chamber of both stupas. It happened over three extraordinary days at the end of August, with the help of a group of over 30 visitors from Malaysia headed by stupa experts.

A big thank you also goes to a dedicated group of Sri Lankan men, both young and young at heart, headed by Chee Way, Ahin and Eric. We were blessed to have many local experts who gave us their valuable time and advice.

That weekend was the culmination of many weeks of hard work, which undoubtedly had its curious complications, but has been a source of inspiration for all who have witnessed it. Certainly the blessings of many unseen beings would have contributed for the successful completion of stage one of the Stupa projects.

The stupas have been completely underwritten and built by local and foreign supporters. The first is on a rocky outcrop at the edge of the old campsite and the other faces it from the north, at another spectacular location overlooking what will be the new Sala. The second stupa will only have its inner core (a pillar, essentially) for some time as the building of the new Sala complex has priority.

Fund-raising for the Sala continues to be heart-warming with the tremendous support and generosity of the community in Perth as well as overseas. In June, we set up a fabulous stall at the Burswood Dome during “A Conversation with the Dalai Lama”, handing out all our pamphlets and booklets. We had a beautiful to-scale model of the new complex, covered by a classy Perspex box, a short “movie” of Dhammasara at www.dhammasara.org.au, pamphlets and bookmarks. Once again a big thank you to all volunteers and contributors.

The Sala fundraiser themed “The Best of Ajahn Brahm” at the Dusit Thai restaurant was a tremendous success. This joyous evening brought together many of our supporters and friends, who not only enjoyed the fabulous dinner but also Ajahn Brahm’s inspiring talk.

Over $30,500 was raised. Our heartfelt thanks goes all the kind organisers and donors.

In October, Venerable Nirodha will take part in the Kathina ceremony of the Buddhist Fellowship in Singapore and the net proceeds are intended to be donated to the Dhammasara new Sala project.

Venerable Hasapanna will be going back to Malaysia in December, 2011 to visit her family as well as giving Dhamma talks in Kuala Lumpur, Petaling Jaya, Penang, Taiping and Ipoh. And also visit Nirodhamaram Bhikkhuni Monastery in Chiangmai, Thailand.

Despite a stupa being constructed in the background and the busloads of visitors to Dhammasara following Ajahn Brahm’s birthday celebration, we’re continuing our practice with joy, inspiration and gratitude in our hearts for the opportunity to be of service to the Buddha Sasana.

Building and Maintenance

For our garage/workshop, Eric not only donated the complete collection of his tools but also fitted it with bench tops, shelves, etc. This was the birthplace of the two stupas.

Another valuable addition to the monastery was the donation of a 12 seater Toyota commuter minibus which makes our regular long drives to Bodhinyana for Dhamma teachings both easier on the drivers as well as economical.

Solar panels have been offered and installed at the vihara and will reduce our electricity bills considerably.

The visitors during dana can now sit huddled around the two outdoor gas heaters that have been kindly donated.

The old dana-shed and caravan at the campsite have been lovingly restored by John Kisko. The caravan near the cottage has also had a makeover by Nadene since she moved in.

Comings and Goings

We continue to be visited by numerous lay and monastic guests. Bhante Sujato and some members of the Santi forest monastery were with us from a day up to a few months! Ven. Chi Kwang Sunim and Ven. Dhammananda spent several days at Dhammasara, sharing with us their years of experience.
Many other monastics visited us around the time of the ASA conference, which the two Dhammasara bhikkhunis also attended. We appreciated the visit of a few busloads of overseas visitors who spent the day at Dhammasara after Ajahn Brahm’s birthday! This included a large group from the Buddhist Gem Fellowship in Malaysia and Buddhist Fellowship in Singapore. Last but not least, a lost dog, Tiger, spent three days at the nuns’ cottage (and won the hearts of all) before we found her owner and she went home.

We also offer our condolences to our dear friend and handyman, Roland, who passed away in England on the 23rd of August.

**Future Plans / Projects**

The Sala complex plan has passed its first phase at council with no objection from the neighbours. The latest information, from the council, assures the permission being granted after the submission of more details of the leveling of the land area of the complex.

A small sandstone wall to hold ashes of deceased supporters/residents will be built near the visitors’ area at the first dam.

Lastly, we look forward to seeing you at our End of the Rains Retreat ceremony on Sunday the 23rd of October. Please arrive at 9.00 am for a 9.30 am start.

**Jhana Grove Meditation Retreat Centre**

The rains retreat is going well with over a dozen meditators practicing at Jhana Grove. Jhana Grove hosted Ajahn Brahm’s birthday celebrations on 6th and 7th August. Many overseas visitors, particularly from Singapore and Malaysia, stayed on for a short while.

Ven. Santutthi changed all the shower heads in the rooms to make them more adaptable to people’s different heights and release water more efficiently. Mulch is continuously being added to the lower garden area. Drainage is continued to be improved to prevent erosion and flooding. The dining room bowing problem has been fixed and is now looking great and flat.

The main achievement of the last few months has been the teacher’s cottage, which is coming along very well. The teacher’s cottage has recently installed kitchen, tiles, ceiling, bathroom and air conditioner. The current work involves the outdoor beams, plumbing and paint.

**Ajahn Brahm is taking the Indonesian literary world by storm**

Ajahn Brahm has always been a very popular monk in South East Asia. It comes as no surprise then that he is now becoming very well known in Indonesia. Life size cut-outs of Ajahn Brahm can be found across Indonesia. No, these cut-outs were not done by the Buddhist Society in Indonesia but by Gramedia, one of the biggest chain of bookstores in Indonesia.

Ajahn Brahm has become a very well know author in Indonesia. His books are being widely read by both Buddhists and non Buddhists in Indonesia, making him Indonesia’s top author. His book “Opening the door of your heart” is Indonesia’s top selling book while his sequel is Indonesia second top selling book.

Well done Ajahn Brahm! May the Dhamma be spread far and wide for the benefit of humankind through your writings.
I remember learning about “Perspective Taking” in psychology many years ago. Perspective taking is about being able to see things from the point of view of another. According to experiments, this ability develops in early childhood and then expands and further develops as we mature into adults.

But, as an adult, I myself have struggled with perspective taking and I have suffered at the hands of others who have not been able to exercise perspective taking. I see the struggles and the suffering that arises because of not practicing it on a daily basis by working with people or by simply being with people. From failed friendships, to troubled marriages, to interpersonal conflicts, to failed negotiations between nations leading to wars, I firmly believe there is a great element of lack of perspective taking.

If perspective taking is an ability we are supposed gain access to and grow with into adulthood, then why do we seem to suffer from the consequences of not being able to use it?

When I investigated this for myself, I realized that under the pretext of perspective taking, I jump into judgment rather than trying to see it from the other person's point of view. If I disagreed with my husband, my likely behavior would be to judge him instead of trying to understand where he is coming from. When I investigated this for myself, I realized that I had to be inside the issue even though I am not the one who is experiencing it or presenting it. I realized that this must be what is called “stepping into the shoes of the other or taking a walk in the other's shoes”. But I also realized that it requires more effort than I ever thought is required, especially when the going gets tough. What I found, when I genuinely stepped into the shoes of another, is that I wasn't doing the judging anymore because I was not an outsider. I was on the inside and doing the walking. When you walk in the other's shoes, you begin to feel and understand. In that, there was less arguments to be had. In that, I found the space to find peaceful resolutions and common grounds.

It got me thinking even more. Taking a walk in the other person's shoes didn't come easy at first. It was hard. It was hard because I had to remove my own shoes in order to step into the shoes of the other person. However, having done so, I felt a whole lot of stress coming off of me. It felt good. The outcomes felt even better. I felt clean and wholesome.

This is when I linked perspective taking to the Buddha's teaching about letting go, loving-kindness, compassion, patience and wisdom.

In order to practise perspective taking, I found that I needed to let go of my sense of attachment: be it an object or an idea or even an emotion. In order to do that, I had to have enough loving-kindness, compassion and wisdom towards the other person and myself. I had to exercise patience at almost all times. If not, I would only be able to stick to my own thoughts, making matters worse.

After having let go of my views, I can step into the other's shoes, to feel and understand where that person is coming from. Without letting go first, I would wear someone's shoes and judge why they should not be wearing them, or how ugly they are or why I am better. When I used compassion and love and let go of my ego, I was able to feel how they felt.

It was a hard but a lovely lesson. While, I knew the concept of “Perspective Taking” and the significance of it in relation to child psychology, it never dawned on me how much it can improve our relationship with others. I also didn't see the qualities of the heart that needed to be cultivated in order to become better at perspective taking. We were not taught this in school, at least not at the time I learnt it. Perhaps it ought to be because, for me at least, they remained amongst the pages of books for many years. They may have stayed that way for as long as I lived and my own growth as a human being would have been stifled.

So, I have tried and put these lovely qualities of heart to practice in my daily life. I must say that I am encountering less and less ugly situations in my own life. At times when I do so, I have tools of kindness, compassion, patience at my disposal. So even if the outside seems dark and gloomy, I don't have to take that upon myself any more, at least not all the time.

**Where to from here?**

From where to HERE, It's HERE that counts!

Don't think of where, what, how, Just do it now, The things to be done, Are in the moment one by one.

Concentrate on what's at hand, Be not concerned with what's been planned, Just toil HERE and let time stop, No mind, no me, no clock tick-tock.

The end of time, for one that's HERE, Present at work in now, mind clear, Could it be the hell I fear, Is just me & time so far from HERE.

So, HERE I am, And HERE I stay, Let time find no footing, Let time fade away.

*by Lincoln Mitchell*
It is 5:30 am and we are driving through Colombo’s sleepy streets with an intensity that seems out of place for this time of the day. Yet the six of us in the car are all earnest about our mission. I feel excited yet apprehensive, not knowing what to expect, but I also feel very fortunate to be part of this group.

We arrive at a swampy vacant land in Sri Lanka’s capital, houses on one side, a large metal gate on the other. In the dim morning light we carefully tread across the muddy ground to the enclosure. We go through the tall gate and my heart is wrenched from its hinges.

I see about 20 cattle tied to wooden railings in a small holding yard. Some of the big ones are sitting planted on the dirt next to where they are tethered, some are restlessly standing and some young calves are trying to walk and free themselves. One of the calves was hurt by the fall from the truck as it was unloaded and was limping badly.

There are about the same number of men as there are cows, some owners waiting to collect their produce, including some who are butchers. One man was sharpening his knife at this illegal abattoir.

I wandered hopelessly amongst the cows. I could not help thinking of the terrible ordeal and death they were going to have very soon and the fact that I could not do much about it for most of them. Then I remembered something Ajahn Brahm had said in one of his talks - “Don’t ever say there is nothing you can do. You can always do something. You can be kind”.

And so I started patting each cow. A few were too scared to let me touch them but most didn’t mind and trusted me. Maybe for the first time in their lives they were treated with kindness. Suddenly they were living beings with feelings rather than just a lump of meat! I looked into their eyes and wished that this softness and kindness will be remembered as they die and will lead them to a better rebirth.

And I also felt something (if only just for moment) had slightly changed in the men who were witnessing this scene. They could see we cared for these beings and that we were visibly distressed by what they were about to do. They started to tell our friend that the animals do not suffer and that they say prayers to make the meat pure.

I felt sorry for these men - all the bad karma they were unknowingly making. Maybe they also, like the animals, had not had much kindness in their lives. They were probably compelled to do this in order to survive. So I wished them well. And they showed some sensitivity and told our friend that they were waiting for us to leave before they started the killing.

Our friend managed to settle the deal. Rs. 70,000 (AUD $ 700 approximately) for the release of four calves – one of them was the limping one. We had all chipped in, yet the biggest donation came from my sister in law’s domestic helper – Rs. 200 (AUD $ 2). Considering her circumstances, she gave far more than any of us!

Our four calves were loaded into our friend’s van. He has two properties and employs people to look after and milk the cows. The earnings from selling the milk go to these people. Our friend said he has never even had a single glass of milk from these cows. He has two children (16 and 11 years old) and every year on their birthdays a cow is saved!

Finally the men were fed up with waiting for us to leave and decided to start the killing. The two big seated cows I was just patting were dragged to the cement killing pen. I left as I could not watch what would happen to my new friends.

It is out of respect for these beings and the ordeal they went through that I tell this story. I felt proud to be a vegetarian that day and I would like to encourage you who are reading this to consider becoming a vegetarian or at least eat less meat. There is an international campaign for Meatless Mondays, where a person does not consume any meat on that day. Perhaps more of us should give this a try.

It is estimated that an average vegetarian saves the lives of over 50 animals each year – thousands during his or her lifetime. Each time we eat, we make a decision between supporting cruelty or living compassionately.

There is always something you can do!
The spring is here in the southern hemisphere ready to awaken us to renewed energy and endeavour. My reflections at this time of year are always around the gratitude I feel towards the Buddha and all those people who have practiced over the years to keep the Buddha’s teaching alive, fresh and relevant. Our monks and nuns will be coming out of their rains retreat soon and there is no doubt we will all benefit from the insights and wisdom they have developed over this time.

Since the last Enlightened Times there have been comings and goings in our administrative area. We have said goodbye to Danny Caporn who was our very first administrator. He had the daunting task of paving the way as our first paid staff. For family reasons Danny needed to retire, so the committee under the expert guidance of our Secretary Peter Smith swung into action to advertise and select someone new. We had an unbelievable response with 11 people applying for the position. Every person was more than qualified and each one would have served the Society well. Out of a short list of 4 people we chose Michael Dove to be our new administrator. Michael had filled in on occasions for Danny so he knew what to expect. He started work around the beginning of September, and has already settled in. Congratulations and welcome Michael.

The committee has decided to use the occasion of change in the “admin” area to think about our procedures and the workings of the office. To that end we have decided to look at building a new, more private office for Michael to work in. Plans have been drawn and will be lodged with the council soon so that a start can be made.

The new office will be between the kitchen and the existing office and extend into the existing front porch area.

Fundraising for the new building program at Dhammsara Monastery is in full swing. We all had a very memorable “Evening with Ajahn Brahm” at the Dusit Thai restaurant in Northbridge. Many people helped under the guidance of our vice president Angelina Fernando and Events organiser Michelle Moss. People’s hearts and wallets were opened with Ajahn’s gentle brand of humour along with the many donations that were given as prizes and items for auction.

All this was of course a prelude for Ajahn Brahm’s 60th birthday party that was held at Jhana Grove on the 7th of August. The sub-committee that organised this event did a magnificent job. Ajahn’s brother Tony and his wife Pat came all the way from the UK as guests of the committee. It was a joy to meet with Tony and Pat. The graciousness they displayed in sharing their time with us and in particular to learn about some of the more juicy aspects of Ajahn’s early life was eventful!

Many people attended on the birthday including many overseas visitors who travelled from all parts of the globe to be here. The organising committee under Ber Sun’s leadership did a great job in fund raising and bringing the whole thing together. They produced a beautiful commemorative booklet that was given to everyone who attended.

As part of Ajahn’s birthday celebration the Singapore Buddhist fellowship gave a magnificent donation, part of which they asked us to put toward ongoing upgrades of our website together with the construction and conversion of the web site to suit mobile phone apps. Technology is moving so fast and by any measure the BSWA website has been an outstanding success. We now minister to a world-wide community and mobile phone technology is now right on the front line. The committee is already working on this project and I will bring you news of its implementation in coming months.

We have been served well over the rains retreat period by Hugh Sykes. He has organised many and varied speakers for the period, while our own monks and nuns have been away on retreat. The quality and interesting nature of the speakers have continued to make Friday night at the Buddhist Society the best place to be, even over the retreat period.

Finally, a note on our relationships with the Wat Pah Pong group of monasteries and the unhappiness around the full ordination of our nuns. There have been moves from all sides to work towards healing this rift. To that end Ajahn Brahm has been invited to have a cup of tea with Ajahn Amaro and other Senior Monks in the UK when he visits his mother there at the end of October. From the perspective of our committee we will continue to do all that is possible to foster good relations with everyone. As mentioned before, the depth of this rift has been a surprise to me personally as well as our committee and I am sure much of our membership. The issues that are involved are not easy to understand, however with patience and goodwill we trust we will get to a point where we can all be friends again.

I look forward welcoming the monks and nuns back out of retreat. The Kathina ceremony for Bodhinyana monastery will be on the 16th October at Jhana Grove and for Dhammasara on the 23rd of October.
The greatest thing about travelling is seeing Dharma in action. It is hard in some ways being the only Buddhist for miles but being a Buddhist is a solitary life in any case.

Being your own best friend, there is only your own karma to reconcile. I remember Ajahn Brahm saying he was not a good teacher because we kept on coming back for more. Actually he is a very good teacher. Ajahn Brahm rings in my head often as my Dharma teacher. During my trips, I remember him telling us to be kind to ourselves as well as others, so I obeyed.

Ajahn Brahm is global. I was in a small temple in Laos the other week. A Laos monk came up to me and asked where I was from. When I replied, “Australia” he said, excitedly, well as excited as a Thai monk can be, “do you know Ajahn Brahm?” He knew I did because my face lit up. We exchanged stories. “He's so funny” he said. He spoke to Brahm in Singapore.

I have travelled widely and practiced my Theravadan tradition in some very out of the way and odd places alone, sometimes much to the consternation of those watching. I am often considered a threat initially because I am the only Buddhist for miles. If people want to know I will tell them, otherwise I keep my religion to myself.

I teach science in China. The Chinese Buddhists obviously do things differently. As they got used to me entering their temples and doing my thing my way they learnt to ignore me. The Dhamma (Buddha's Teaching) after all is the same no matter what colour the robes or shape of the temple.

China itself is going through a huge social and economic change and as the government continues to pour vast sums of money into the building and rebuilding of temples and monasteries; there is a resurgence and 'coming out' of Buddhists. As China has deep-set roots in Buddhism, I now have children in classes who are open and honoured to be Buddhist.

However, temples have started to become big business and crowd pullers in China. If one looks at the many flash cars of businessmen, most have Buddhist rupas on the dashboard. Those with money give big donations. The bigger the donation the bigger the esteem and merit, same as the cars they drive. Things do not change wherever you go. A leopard cannot change its spots.

In today's world, it's all about glitz and glamour. The simple life is no longer enough. Gone are the days of dusty caves and simple stone shrines on street corners or forest paths. Prestige, status and possessions are a symbol of who we are. The more we have, the better we are looked upon.

In Buddhism we are taught about the 4 noble truths, with cravings as a source of Dukkha (suffering). In order for economic societies to develop, we are encouraged to buy more, have more and want more. No wonder people are in conflict and confused. I see more and more people are jumping religions after a quick fix, blame shifting and wanting holy handouts. Karma and Dharma are simply too hard.

I can remember the happiest time of my life as when I was young and all I had to my name was in the backpack. When I travel, storing my possessions is so much of a chore, so expensive and so vexing that I wonder why I have any at all. I would love to return to that single backpack. Why do we crave so much?

Fancy temples or dusty caves? What is more important? Glitz or content? One thing for sure, they are so many people out there after our souls. The Buddha was right when he told us to look for ourselves, the answers are out there to be found; it may take a little time and patience but eventually the answers will come. I ask myself, why aren't we all monks and nuns? Then I think of the pragmatics of Dana and the Vinaya.

I had a long conversation with a lady who was attending a Saturday Dharma class in China. She was curious about our tradition. She saw her purpose in life and rebirth clearly to become a Bodhisattva. Her temple had reputedly the largest collection of Bodhisattva rupas in China. She did say that she found, “many monks treated it like a job and did not have the conviction” she expected. She saw the world as a dangerous place with too many people and too many religions and much intolerance.

What I discovered is that each temple has its own thoughts. So perhaps Buddhism is a collection of thousands of thoughts and traditions, sometimes there is a merger between the Hinayana and the Mahayana. Each teacher has a particular strength or foundation and many parents in Theravadan countries choose where their children go because of this.
I found one of the greatest things about Chinese Buddhist temples are their vegetarian restaurants. They do not have the Dana offering like at Bodhinyana. Most Chinese Buddhist are vegetarian and I am really happy with that. I do not have to worry about what is in the food. Actually it is more like the Jains because they do not eat onion and garlic.

I love to eat at Chinese temples as one can feed the stomach, the mind and the heart with compassion and honesty. A great day out and no living creature gets hurt, just what the metta sutta says.

As my journey continues I look forward to helping people in any way I can. There is one thing for sure, Chinese students are not just respectful and honourable they are very, very clever too. I actually like teaching again and spend 99% of my time doing just that rather than crowd control.

Ajahn Brahm kept on telling me to 'let go', so I did and the results were amazing. The kids learn more and are far happier. When I do not have to battle with confused students with huge social issues teaching and learning becomes so much more fun.

It’s a win - win situation. Teachers are so bound up with control that they create most of the problems that they find. However, I have to add that teachers are 'expected’ to do this by their line managers who are the real control freaks.

So as the journeys continue I wish to share my experiences of Buddhism in China and other parts of the world with you, the reader. I spend many happy hours listening to Buddhist talks, Dharma and music from Chinese Buddhist chants. Actually much of the Chinese CD music is in Pali as I can recognise the words. Even then, I always hope to get the odd message from the BBC (the Brahm Broadcasting Company).

Keep up the good work and put up more Dhamma talks/videos on the Internet for the rest of us who are away from Perth, Australia.

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BSWA Announcements

International Food Fair

Every year, the members and supporters of BSWA get together to enjoy a large medley of delicious cuisines from many parts of the world.

This event brings together all the different nationalities to enjoy a common goal – enjoying good food in the company of good people.

This year, the BSWA International Food Fair will be held on Sunday, 27 November 2011 from 9:30am to 2:30pm.

This event will be held at Dhammaloka Buddhist Centre, 18-20 Nanson Way, Nollamara.

All are invited. We are hoping to see you, your friends and family there.

Perth Sangha at 7th Global Conference on Buddhism

The 7th Global Conference on Buddhism will be held from 10-11 December 2011 in Jakarta, Indonesia.

This conference is organised by the Buddhist Fellowship Indonesia with the support of Buddhist Fellowship Singapore.

The theme of this conference is “Buddhist solutions for the modern troubled times”. Ajahn Brahm will be the keynote speaker at this conference and Ajahn Brahmali from Bodhinyana Monastery will also be a speaker at this conference.

For more details, please visit www.7thgcb.com

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BCWA Representatives
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Upcoming Activities

Dhammaloka

- Chanting, Guided Meditation and Dhamma Talk - Every Friday, 7pm-9pm.
- Beginner's Meditation Class - Every Saturday, classes start 1st Sat of the Month, 3pm-4:15pm.
- Sutta Study Group - 2nd & 4th Sunday of the Month, 3pm - 4:15pm.
- Dhamma School for Children - Every Sunday, 9:15am - 10:15am.
- Living Buddhism Group – 2nd & 4th Friday of the Month, 5:30pm - 7pm.
- Sangha Dana - Every Weekend, 10am.

Armadale Meditation Group

Meditation Class - every Tuesdays, 7pm - 8:30pm

Dhammaloka Library Opening Hours

FRIDAY: 6.00 - 7.30pm (closes, then reopens) 9.00 - 10.00pm
SATURDAY: 2.00 - 3.00pm (closes then reopens) 4.15 - 5.00pm

Meditation Retreats at Jhana Grove Retreat Centre

Nine Day Retreats • 11 Nov - 20 Nov
Weekend Retreats • 28 Oct - 30 Oct

BSWA Nanga Bush Camp

BSWA is organising a Buddhist camp in beautiful bush and river setting for Buddhist oriented adults who want to meet like minded people and enjoy a variety of activities including meditation, walking, canoeing, socialising and learning more about Buddhist practise. This camp will be held in Dwellingleup from 21-23 October 2011.

International Food Fair

BSWA will be hosting an International Food Fair, highlighting many delicious vegetarian and non-vegetarian meals from all over the world, at Dhammaloka Buddhist Centre from 9:30am to 2:30 pm on 27 November 2011.

End of Rains Retreat

The monasteries will observe the End of Rains Retreat as follows:
Bodhinyana (Monks) Monastery - 16 October 2011 from 9:00am.
Dhammasara (Nuns) Monastery - 23 October 2011 from 9:00am.

The activities are correct at time of printing. Please contact BSWA (info@bswa.org) to verify the times closer to the date.