Happy UN Vesak Day 2016!

The United Nations General Assembly, by its resolution 54/115 of 1999, recognized internationally the Day of Vesak to acknowledge the contribution that Buddhism, one of the oldest religions in the world, has made for over two and a half millennia and continues to make to the spirituality of humanity.

On Saturday 7 May 2016, the Buddhist Council of Western Australia brought the UN Day of Vesak celebration to Perth for the first time. Held at the Migrant Pavilion, Ozone Reserve, in East Perth, the celebrations were under-cover but not entirely protected from the cool breeze. The threat of rain may have kept away the crowds, but the celebration continued. It was a fantastic coming together of the different Buddhist traditions in Perth. The children of the Sri Lankan vihara got us off to a great start with the National Anthem and a real crowd pleasing rendition of the ‘Happy Vesak Song’ which I was impressed to hear they learned in only 2 weeks. Their bodhi leaf lyric sheets were adorable! The children were followed by the speakers who included Kevin Dickson the president of BCWA, Eleni Evan-gel MLA, Margaret Quirk MLA, Cliff Morris representing Men of Trees, Rebecca Ball Office of Multicultural Interests and of course our very own Ajahn Brahm. The venerable Ajahn Brahm did not let us down, and fulfilled his unspoken promise to always make us laugh. The celebrations included Thai dancing, Indonesian and Sri Lankan performances. The meditation tent was also popular with sessions held by the Diamond Way Buddhist Centre, Venerable Hasapanna, and the Hayagriva Buddhist Centre. What a way to kick start Vesak celebrations!

The BSWA celebrations will continue with the joyous occasion of Welcoming the New Buddhists ceremony conducted by Ajahn Brahm and other monks and nuns, on Vesak Day - Sunday 22 May 2016 at 5.00pm (Perth time) at Dhammaloka. The 8 precepts observance day is at Dhammaloka on Monday 23 May.

Welcome to a new Buddhist!

Marjorie from Armadale centre attended the Welcoming of the New Buddhists ceremony in 2015:

My journey into Buddhism began by attending meditation sessions at the Armadale meditation group each Tuesday evening, beginning in July 2014. I was so taken with how the monks imparted their wisdom and insight regarding meditation that I wondered if I would ever be able to achieve something similar. After practising, I then decided to follow Buddhism and take the 5 Precepts. As Vesak Day in May 2015 was getting closer I was disappointed to find that I would not be in Perth for it, but would be in Vietnam. Then, when I discovered the ceremony would be streamed live on the Internet, my heart nearly burst ... here was my chance. Continued on p6
From the President

Dear Fellow Buddhist

Welcome back to our relaunched of Enlightened Times (ET), a special thanks to our new Editor Robyn Godwin who recently volunteered for the role. The reason for the previous hiatus of ET was difficulty trying to find someone who had the time, motivation and skills to be the Editor. ET is a case in point to show that volunteers are the life blood of the organisation and I encourage you to volunteer where possible to continue to help make the Society what it is and gain a sense of community in return.

I am pleased to report that the Society is generally in good shape and we are all energised by the completion of Dhammasara Nuns Monastery in January. Dhammasara seems to be the last of the major building projects for a while so we can all take the time to rest and consolidate our growth over the last 5 years. Having said this we recently discovered that we need $450,000 to complete roadworks at Dhammasara to meet council requirements, so stay tuned for some fundraising activities.

Aside from Dhammasara, in the last year, we have re-organised and added more support to our expanded Information Technology Department. With several new IT projects under way, the jewel in the crown is the new BSWA website we are working on and intend launching this year. Paid professionals are working alongside our volunteers to create a new format that will be easier to navigate, have more resources, and allow better access to our library of monastic Dhamma talks. It should be mentioned that our Dhamma talks are on track for more than 3 million downloads in 12 months and our current website is in the top 1% visited in the world.

Looking to involvement of people at the Society and we have seen membership numbers double in the last five years from 2,500 to 4,500 with Friday night Dhammoloka and Saturday meditation classes consistently being full. As well as this the new Committee has attracted some good candidates to run the Society and we welcome new comers Lay Har Goh (Hon. Secretary), Chris Perrier (Vice President) and Chris Oram (Buildings Supervisor).

Unfortunately our recent growth has meant parking is now at a premium at Dhammaloka and our relationship with the City of Stirling is undergoing testing times. I encourage members to park mindfully in regard to space utilisation and residents driveways when parking on the streets around the centre.

I hope to see you participating at our centres sometime soon and congratulate all members and volunteers for their involvement (and trying to navigate their own personal path) in something as noble the Buddhist Dhamma.

With Metta

Drew Bellamy
President BSWA

Obituary

It is with sadness we announce that Donald Casson passed away in January this year. Donald was one of the founding members and the second president of the BSWA. His contribution in those early days made the strong foundation on which our current BSWA stands tall.

Thank you for your service Donald!

Shaving the way to Enlightened Nuns fundraiser!

BSWA is currently looking for team of volunteers interested in assisting in the organisation of a fundraiser for the Dhammasara road project.

We are also looking for people who want to shave their heads!

If you are interested in helping out in any way at all, please email editorET@bswa.org

Tech geeks apply here! The Enlightened Times will soon be available in email format (instead of as an attachment), with your help! If you have experience converting PDF to HTML and/or using mailchimp, please email editorET@bswa.org
On the Ordination of Women

Sister Rocana left Bodhinyana Monastery recently to take a ‘higher’ ordination in England. She visited Thailand en-route and was rather disappointed at what she saw of the opportunities for nuns there. The place of women in Theravada monasticism is a problem no less prickly than some of the native bushes here in the monastery! But it cannot be avoided. It can only be understood in relation to the VINAYA, the body of monastic rules and regulations established by the Buddha which are binding on every Buddhist monk and nun. Thus in this article, I will discuss the ORDINATION OF WOMEN. ‘Bhikkhu’ is the name which denotes a fully ordained Buddhist monk. The term literally means one who dedicates himself to renunciation. ‘Bhikkhuni’ is the name which denotes a fully ordained Buddhist nun. During his lifetime, the Buddha established thriving communities of both bhikkhus and bhikkunis. However, not only did the Buddha lay down more rules of discipline for the bhikkhus and bhikkunis. The third of which being extended to complete celibacy, plus abstaining from eating outside of the morning time. Only when she had kept these six rules UNBROKEN FOR TWO YEARS could she, with the permission of her parents and husband, take higher ordination as a bhikkhuni. Should she break a precept then she would begin her period of training anew. Having completed her training, she should then seek an experienced bhikkhuni of at least 12 years standing to be her preceptor. A preceptor has to be agreed upon as such by the local community of bhikkhunis before she may ordain another and even then, she may only ordain one candidate every other year. The candidate is first ordained in a formal meeting of at least five bhikkhus and afterwards this ‘ordination on one side’ is confirmed before a formal meeting of at least five bhikkhus. Only then is she a fully ordained nun according to Theravada tradition.

The Bhikkhuni Sangha flourished for many centuries and spread throughout South and East Asia. It seems to have died out in Sri Lanka in the 11th century C.E. (according to Professor Malalasekera) mainly due to the civil turmoil coming from invasion and war. The fact that the Bhikkhuni Sangha was not re-established in the last decades of the 11th century when Sri Lanka was again peaceful strongly suggests that there were few if any bhikkhunis in neighbouring lands, such as India or Burma, who could be invited to Sri Lanka to re-establish the tradition. For, as explained above, to ordain another bhikkhuni one requires a minimum of five existing bhikkhunis; once their number drops to below five then the Institution is doomed. For many centuries the Buddhists in Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma have assumed that the Order of Bhikkhunis died out ages ago and that it is impossible to revive. To compensate for this, other female monastic traditions have been established by the monks to help give the opportunity to women to live a simple meditative life. Such an Order is that of the white robed nuns of Thailand keeping the 8 Precepts and such a nun was Sister Rocana. But being a later addition, this ordination lacks the status of having been established by the Buddha and lacks the authority of an ancient tradition and thus social and cultural prejudices have been able to take root and prevail. For this reason many senior monks, such as Ajahn Sumedho in England for example, have attempted to revive and build upon the female novice ordination. Though still less than a bhikkhuni, a female novice wears brown and essentially keeps 10 precepts, the last of which is abstaining from the use or possession of money. Thus a female novice is more of a renunciant than the white robed Thai nun, and, wearing robes similar in appearance to those of a monk, she may get more of the respect she deserves. There has even been much discussion recently, that is in the last decade or so, that it may be possible to revive the full bhikkhuni ordination. There are bhiksunis of the Mahayana tradition in Taiwan and Hong Kong. ‘Bhiksuni’ is merely the Sanskrit (the language of Mahayana) equivalent to our ‘Bhikkhuni’. If it turns out that the ordination procedure used by the Mahayana bhiksunis contains the vital ingredient of a formal resolution, put three times to a gathering of at least 5 bhikkhunis, informing those gathered that the candidate wishes for ordination as a bhikkhuni and asking their approval, then the ordination is probably valid by Theravada standards. Should this be so, and I have no information on this at present, then we may see the full female counterpart of the monks restored to the Theravada tradition.

Whatever the technicalities, one should always keep in mind the old English proverb: “Where there is a will, there is a way.” I am often amazed to see how far rules can be bent under the weight of compassion. All it needs is the motive for doing the bending, and that motive will increase as do the numbers of women who show by their example a willingness to surrender to a renunciant’s life.
After more than 20 years suffering variable levels of depression, I had tried everything. All the self-help books told me how to make more money, be smarter, be better at work, and to set my goals high. They really raised my expectation levels for what my life could be. I tried improving my communication skills, exercising, eating better. I've had countless careers and lived in different places, and made many new friends. None of it helped, at least not in the long term.

After finding myself crying in the toilet cubicle at work, having been bullied by a colleague for two years, I decided to actually see a professional. I saw a psychologist who suggested almost everything on the list above, possibly with a few additions. Things still didn't improve. Eventually, in tears (again) I saw my doctor and got medicated. Wow. Finally a solution! Or so I thought.

Well that worked for about 8 years before the medication ‘pooped out.’ Apparently it does that (WHAT?!#?). This time the depression came back with a vengeance, not knowing if I would ever find a permanent solution made it a million times worse. It took me a few months before I even recognised the signs, and of course I tried to ‘pull my socks up’ for a while before I saw my GP and got new medication. After a few more months things improved.

Of course, now I was constantly paranoid that it would come back again. I studied up. I read every remotely expert web page I could find. Beyond Blue had some fabulous resources. I think I read their booklet ‘What works for depression’ about 3 times and followed through on some of the ‘mindfulness’ training programs their site linked to.

Meditation ranked high as an effective treatment. I remembered some of the things I’d read in the past in books and magazines. I’m sure that my doctors and psychologists had mentioned it. Finally, I decided it was time to give it a go. Not having the money to spend on some fancy mindfulness program or even to pay $10 every time I went to a class, I found a free one. The Buddhist Society of WA was running free beginner meditation classes on a Saturday for four weeks. You didn’t even need to be Buddhist to attend. Perfect.

So I went to the first couple of beginner classes. Missed the next couple when life just got in the way. I didn’t have instant success, but they told me to pay attention to how I felt once I’d sat for a while. Even what I had thought of as ‘bad’ or ‘failed’ meditation gave me some element of peace. O.K. I thought, maybe I should stick with this meditation business. I started going to the Friday night meditations. That Ajahn Brahm guy was good at teaching meditation. I was getting more peace all the time.

Eventually, I stuck around for one of Ajahn Brahm’s Dhamma talks. I think the first thing I learned was that the outside stuff wasn’t to blame for my lifes difficulties. The relationship problems, the unhappiness, it was all coming from inside (Holy Cow!!). Life just got easier and easier the more time I spent at BSWA listening our Sangha and practising meditation.

I didn’t meditate at home very often, but if I didn’t go to the Friday or Saturday sessions for a while I could really notice my peace slipping away. I would tell myself it was time to ‘top up the Happy Bank’ and get back to a class. Eventually I had the opportunity to go on a 7 day retreat at the Aruna Ratanagiri monastery in the UK. Even though I had to google the place to rediscover
Ten years ago Ajahn Brahm was unknown in Sri Lanka. Today he is a household name. I remember his first visit in 2005. It was low-key, he only delivered a few Dhamma talks in and around the capital city, Colombo. Though the Sri Lankans did not know much about him, the media publicity made people come in their thousands to see him. Of course, once he was with them, it did not take long for the people to realise how simple, charming and friendly he was. Ajahn Brahm was willing to meet people, sign autographs, talk to them and was never in a hurry. At the end of his four-day visit I wrote an article to the popular weekend paper ‘Sunday Times’ starting with the often used words – ‘He came. He saw. He conquered’.

It was a novel experience for the Buddhists who form 77% of Sri Lanka’s population. He introduced meditation in the most simple but absorbing way. He related stories. The many thousands were mesmerised. His one-time pupil, Venerable Abhaya translated the talks since most of the men, women and children who flocked to the temples did not know English.

As a child I remember going to the village temple on full moon Poya days with my mother in the evening. Either the resident monk or one invited from a nearby temple would give a teaching. Before that a basket of flowers would be ‘auctioned’ to collect funds for the upkeep of the temple. At the end of the auction, a few rupees would be collected. The flowers would be offered to the Buddha in the image house. The teaching usually started around 8pm. The temple bell would ring and a drummer would beat his drum while the monk proceeded under an umbrella to the preaching hall. Before he entered the hall, he would have his feet washed since the monks rarely used slippers. They would walk barefoot. The monk would stand on the step to the teaching hall and a devotee would pour water and clean his feet with his hands. Another would wipe the feet with a towel. Then the monk would walk up to the elevated mini-dais and get comfortable on the chair which was always covered with a white sheet as a mark of respect.

The others would all be seated on mats. A ‘dayaka’ (supporter) would offer a betel tray (a sheaf of betel leaves is traditionally offered as a mark of respect and auspicious beginnings) and invite him to deliver the teaching. The monk would then give the Five Precepts, reciting a stanza related to the subject of his teaching and commence. Often he would base the teaching on a Jataka tale which we children were fond of listening to since it would always be a lovely story based on a previous life of the Buddha. An elderly devotee would sit close to the monk and after every few sentences say ‘ehei’ meaning ‘it is so’.

The teaching was of an hour or more, ending with giving merit to those who have passed and to the ‘devas.’ The monk would bless those present. While most of the devotees would walk back to their homes, those who had observed the Ten Precepts in the morning would stay in the temple overnight. When Ajahn Brahm visited the Bhikkhu Training Centre at the suburban town Maharagama, he was accorded a warm reception. The temple premises were decorated with Buddhist flags and traditional designs using young coconut leaves, creating a festive mood. After being welcomed by the senior monks of the temple he was conducted to the stage specially done up for the occasion so that he could be seen by the huge crowd.
When Ajahn Brahm first came to Sri Lanka...cont from p3

Traditional dancers preceded him and crowds gathered on either side of the pathway chanting ‘Sadhu! Sadhu!’ Possibly it was a novel experience for him. Carrying a tray of white flowers, Ajahn walked under a ‘muthu kudaya’ – ‘umbrella of pearls’ - used exclusively at temples when relics are taken around or when a monk is taken on procession. After Ajahn offered the flowers at the impressive Buddha image, he was offered the betel tray and invited to deliver the Dhamma talk. It was a day to remember. As a regular visitor to the temple I could not remember such a large crowd turning up to listen to a ‘stranger’. Ajahn went on for over two hours. They all sat and listened.

Encouraged by this response, a group of enthusiasts formed the Ajahn Brahm Society - Sri Lanka under the leadership of Venerable Mettavihari from Denmark who got his ordination in Sri Lanka around two decades ago. Today Ajahn’s visits are eagerly looked forward to. There is a clamour for reservations for meditation sessions which are held at a hillside resort. The Society reserves the biggest conference hall in the capital city of Colombo well in advance for a full-day session. Free passes issued are grabbed weeks ahead. In addition to the two halls in the premises, temporary accommodation is also provided along with meals and other facilities. The premises are filled to capacity. In addition, there is an enthusiastic response from TV viewers for Ajahn’s Dhamma talks and discussions. At the end of it all, they wait for Ajahn’s next visit.

Welcome to a new buddhist....From first page...

The big day arrived so I made sure I was back at the hotel ... and waited ... then, there it was, Ajhan Brahm and others reciting the 3 Refuges and the 5 Precepts. With my voice in unison with his and theirs, tears were running down my face, and I became a Buddhist. It was a very happy and emotional experience. I thought my heart would burst as I felt something had been found that had been lost for so long. These 5 Precepts mean that my life from now on will be enhanced by understanding myself better. I will be using my everyday actions to surround myself with loving kindness and tolerance, thereby bringing happiness and non-harm to others. I will be able to bring a light where before there was none.

While I was in Vietnam I was also able to participate in a private meditation session at Truc Lam Monastery in Dalat. It was so enhancing that to do this gave me a feeling of being home.

My life has now found a different kind of happiness which I am sure will continue until I am reborn. So until then, I shall continue in the footsteps of Buddha and say “Thank You” for this most precious gift given to me.

Marjorie Vincenti, Aaron Pederson and Angela Separovic

The Enlightened Times is always looking for submissions. Do you have a story relevant to Buddhism or our community?

Email: editoret@bswa.org
It was a big year for BSWA. We held the 9th Global Conference on Buddhism on 8 and 9 August 2015. The Conference was hugely promoted, with Buddhist flags through the City of Perth. The conference provided an opportunity for us to deal with many tough issues in an interactive and open manner and with a Buddhist approach to solutions.

It took 18 months from the planning stage. As with anything, there were hiccups but with a good team it was a success. We had more than 900 attendees – I think the words of one of our attendees best sums up the event: “Best Conference ever. I had no idea what to expect but the calibre of speakers was far beyond what I could have imagined...The brain power in the room was phenomenal. I laughed, I cried, I wished it wouldn’t end...”

There were some significant benefits from the publicity for the conference. We are now recognised by the government as one of the largest English based Buddhist organisations in Australia and are invited to government consultations regularly. Further, the number of subscribers to the BSWA YouTube channel has nearly doubled in just two years to over 70,000. This has been helped along by some major work on our IT facilities. We are now able to deliver reliable uninterrupted live-streaming and good audio and video quality on the BSWA YouTube channel.

In Dec 2014 Ajahn Brahm, Bhante Bodhidaja and myself met with Minister Michaelia Cash. This meeting was to address the unfair situation Buddhist monks and nuns faced with their visa applications. Under the law Buddhist Sangha were prevented from obtaining permanent residency. With no salary, they could not meet the minimum wage requirement imposed by the law so could never qualify for permanent residency. Through our efforts, we managed to change the law. Buddhist monks and nuns are no longer prevented from obtaining permanent residency visas simply because of their vow of poverty.

Another massive project was building Dhammasara. We had many volunteers who contributed – both skilled and unskilled. It is very humbling to see how much the volunteers have done. I am really happy to have been involved from the initial contract stage to the completion of the project. There was a change of builder and new tenders and contracts had to be negotiated and executed. The project had run smoothly under the very capable management of Ven. Hasapanna & Ven. Karunika. The building works have been completed. Now for the roads!

I would like to express my appreciation and thanks to all the BSWA Committee members and all the many volunteers. I would also like to express my gratitude to our Ajahn Brahm and all Sangha members. I am inspired by their dedication to the dhamma and their kindness.

The 2015 Wrap-Up by Cecilia Mitra
the name of the monk who taught the retreat (it was Ajahn Abhinando), I do remember the meditation. I got real joy on that retreat, and I honestly can’t remember ever feeling that at any time in the decades prior. [Yes, as Ajahn Brahm has said – good meditation really is better than sex!]

After leaving that retreat I took a train down to Southampton and had a few hours to spare before my flight back to France. I found a park and cried for half an hour. I didn’t like the world at all! It was years before I learned that the reason for that was my attachment to the peace I had gained on retreat.

Worth it. My practice gained new strength and at some point, after listening to Dhamma talks on a Friday night and at home, I realised that I might just be a Buddhist.

After that I participated more fully in the community program and went on a few more retreats. Most recently I attended Ajahn Bramali’s sutta retreat. I had no idea what to expect from a ‘Sutta’ retreat, but figured there would probably be time for meditation. Oh Boy. My meditation was so good that hearing the Dhamma gave me the ‘warm and fuzzies’. It made sense in a way I cannot even begin to explain. Bugger me but I think I’ve tripped over the path. Now my feet appear to be stuck on it. No, I’m not Enlightened yet, but I’m on the path! The Path!!

So meditation, and the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha have saved my life. Quite literally. Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhuuuuu!

Well, that’s all for now folks. I do very much hope you enjoyed our latest edition of the Enlightened Times.

To those of you who were a bit late sending me your articles, the next edition is coming in only 2 months. I am restricting the Ajahn Brahm biographical pieces to no more than one per edition. Watch our web page, I’ll see if I can talk him into an Autobiography! Or at least a place where we can put all the wonderful stories about him...

I do welcome all feedback, suggestions and submissions - editorET@bswa.org

With Metta
Robyn Godwin, Editor