



AUSTRALIAN SANGHA ASSOCIATION

A representative body for monks and nuns of all Buddhist traditions

Australian Honours and Awards Secretariat
Order of Australia

9 Oct 2018

Dear Madeleine,

Thank you for inviting me to comment on the nominee, Ajahn Brahmavamso.

I am proud to endorse the nomination of Ajahn Brahmavamso for an award within the Order of Australia. I would like to mention how Ajahn had re-opened the door for women in Buddhism, something close to my heart.

I have the honour of a close affiliation with Ajahn Brahmavamso through our monasteries. Ajahn Brahmavamso is the Abbot of Bodhinyana Monastery - the single largest community of Theravada monks outside Asia. In 1998, I met Bhante Sujato from Bodhinyana Monastery and I was told there was a similar monastery for nuns – the Dhammasara Nuns Monastery in Gidgegannup, WA.

Ajahn Brahmavamso was instrumental in the design and fundraising for Dhammasara Nuns Monastery, established in 1998 with an Australian nun Ajahn Vayama as the Abbot. I was drawn to this lifestyle of living in the forest, so I applied to join in Dhammasara Monastery in 2001. Here, I started my monastic life.

Ajahn Brahmavamso continued to boldly pave the way for gender equality in religion. In October 2009 with the support from his monks he decided to open the door for women to receive Higher Ordination ceremony (*Bhikkhuni*) in Australia. I was one of the four nuns ordained as *Bhikkhunis* in Australia. This move had received heavy criticism from his peers overseas, as some felt that *Bhikkhuni* lineage had died out a long time ago, and therefore its revival was not possible. Ajahn stood by his decision, as he believed that women should be given equal opportunity to live a monastic life. Since then, more *Bhikkhuni* Ordinations ceremonies had taken place in Australia, including one in Santi Forest Monastery (NSW) and another in Newbury Buddhist Monastery (VIC) where the first four Australian nuns of Tibetan tradition took their higher ordination. Women monasticism started to flourish in Australia.

Dhammasara is now the largest Nuns training monastery in Australia of Theravada Forest Tradition. From a single Australian nun, Dhammasara has grown in both its facilities and the Monastic Community of nuns. Today in Dhammasara Monastery, there are 10 resident *Bhikkhunis*, 3 Novice Nuns and 2 Postulant Trainee nuns, with a waiting list of Australian and Overseas women opting to join the monastic community.

Dhammasara specialized in training nuns for their future roles of carrying out religious responsibilities, providing pastoral care and spiritual guidance to the Australian community in their personal and family lives. In continuing Ajahn Brahmavamso's legacy, the nuns at Dhammasara also serve as a role model to Australian Buddhist women.

Ajahn Brahmavamso has been a Buddhist monk for over 40 years. In the last 30 years, he has been sharing his knowledge of Buddhist teachings in Australia and internationally. Everywhere he goes he projects a peaceful and wise presence.



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Ajahn had always wanted a career that brings happiness to others and brings happiness to him. While a scholar and practitioner of strict monastic codes, Ajahn is gifted with profound ability to use humour and stories to make Buddhist teachings meaningful to those facing difficulties in life.

His natural joyful personality enable him to connect easily with people - helping individuals find inner peace and happiness regardless of the race, gender, religious belief, or social status. He always focuses on serving the person or people in front of him at any one time, be that a person with terminal cancer, someone suffering from depression, a prisoner, someone dealing with marital problems, a dedicated meditator, or anybody at all without any discrimination.

Despite his busy schedule and the vast audience that he addresses, he always emphasizes being in the present moment. He places his attention fully to the person or issue in front of him. It is inspiring and somewhat magical to see how efficient he is in helping others.

As an experienced meditation teacher, Ajahn practices what he preaches. One of the outcomes of meditation is a calm mind. When the mind is calm, it helps to diminish any mental agony, hence reduced the overall bodily suffering. His audience recalled a few episodes when Ajahn caught a bad cold, or was down with food poisoning. He was seen meditating for about 30 minutes, resulting in a calm mind and relaxed body, to the point that he was able overcome the major symptoms of his illness, and he was able to carry on teaching.

Ajahn's daily schedule is very hectic, but he always uses any opportunity to meditate. He comes out feeling recuperated, recharged and fully present for his next appointment. In Buddhism, meditation practice is one of the 8 paths to realize the end of suffering (Nirvana).

Apart from being the Abbot of Bodhinyana Monastery, Ajahn Brahmavamso also holds the following other positions/roles outside the monastery:

- Founding Chair and currently Treasurer, Australian Sangha Association
- Spiritual Director, Buddhist Society of WA (Inc.)
- Spiritual Director, Cambodian Buddhist Society of WA (Inc.)
- Spiritual Advisor, Buddhist Society of Victoria
- Spiritual Director, Santi Forest Monastery in NSW
- Spiritual Patron, Buddhist Fellowship Singapore
- Director, Brahm Education Centre in Singapore
- Trustee, Anukampa Bhikkhuni (Buddhist Nuns) Project in UK
- Meditation Retreat Teacher overseas, interstate and in WA
- Speaker at conferences, conventions, seminars and other venues
- Leader of the Australian Delegation to World Buddhist Summits - Cambodia 2003, Thailand 2005, Japan 2009 and 2014, Sri Lanka 2017

In Western Australia, Ajahn Brahmavamso's vision for a vibrant Buddhist community has resulted in the establishment the Bodhinyana Monks Monastery in Serpentine, the Dhammasara Nuns Monastery in Giddegannup, the Dhammaloka Buddhist Centre in Nollamara and Jhana Grove Meditation Retreat Centre in Serpentine, with the Buddhist Society of Western Australia as its parent body. Under Ajahn Brahmavamso's stewardship, the Buddhist Society of Western Australia



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has grown from a handful of individuals to become the largest multi-ethnic Buddhist society in Australia, promoting a strong dynamic of mutual support between the monastic and lay communities.

Everything Ajahn Brahmavamso does is voluntary. Nothing is remunerated. As a true renunciant, he gives selflessly, not expecting anything in return. He feeds on the joy of helping others. He is often rewarded by responses from people who thanked him for helping them saved their life, saved their marriage and family, overcome their sicknesses and other difficulties.

Those living with him can attest his simple and frugal livelihood. When he is back at his monastery, he focuses on teaching the monks and nuns. With whatever time is left, he gravitates into his little forest hut where he spends time meditating in seclusion.

The Australian Sangha Association and all the monastics are very blessed to have this brilliant, dedicated monk with us here; he is our teacher and our friend.

It is my privilege to offer my fullest endorsement of his nomination for this prestigious recognition. I would be happy to answer any questions. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Venerable Hāsapañña Bhikkhuni
Chair, Australian Sangha Association
Abbot, Dhammasara Nuns Monastery
Assistant Spiritual Director, The Buddhist Society of WA (Inc).