



BESS



Buddhist Education Services for Schools

“promoting universal values for living together in peace and harmony for the happiness, health and prosperity of all”

NEWSLETTER

Term 2 2018

Presidents Welcome

Hello and welcome every-one of you to this, the launch of the BESS newsletter. It has been quite a journey to get here, and is a milestone event for BESS. We have been very quiet about our work over the years but this opportunity to stand up and be heard is a vital move in our wider plan to grow our services for the students we teach, for our members and the Dharma.

Those of you who were involved from the very beginning and who have not heard from us for many years, might even have wondered if BESS was still functioning! Well yes, indeed we are, and we intend to keep in-touch regularly from now on with termly Newsletters. For those who are not aware of our history, read and enjoy the article written by a key founding member of BESS, Mr Rahu Sarath-Chandra, and know that we are building on the dream he and his team had for the future growth of teaching the Dharma to our next generation of western Buddhists.

The first real opportunity to promote our work happened at the Festival of Tibet in April of this year and it was with some trepidation that the committee decided to have a small stand there. There is a short article in this Newsletter about our experiences at the festival and our complete amazement and joy at the success we had. This gave us the impetus we needed to create more

opportunities to have a presence at other, appropriate, events, and if you think your temple or Dharma centre might welcome us at an open day or festival, then please let us know.

The pressure of our busy lives, driven by greed and the anxiety of losing our place in a society driven by the axial importance of technology, can cause us to lose sight of the vitality of the Buddha's words, which are as relevant today as they were 2600 years ago. This makes the work of the wonderful BESS volunteer teachers who share the Dharma in our schools, all the more important. We honour the BESS mission statement, 'to promote universal values for living in peace and harmony', by introducing the ethical values taught by the Buddha to our young people, giving them a sense of their own value through an understanding of loving kindness and compassion for others, 'for the peace and prosperity of all'.

Perhaps you will be inspired to contact BESS now and see how you can help us continue the work of the Dharma in our schools.

Please enjoy this Newsletter and watch out for the next one in September.

Warmest regards from Venerable Tseten



A Brief History of BESS: 2007-2018

Author: Rahu Sarath-Chandra. Edited by Venerable Tseten

The earliest known attempt to introduce the teaching of Buddhism in public schools in Brisbane was made by the chief monk at the Vietnamese Phap Quang Temple. He taught at the Brisbane State High School for many years and was extremely popular. When he retired, Mr. Rahu Sarath-Chandra took his place and at the same time, practitioners from the Chung Tian Temple at Underwood also began to teach at the primary schools at Inala and Durack.

In December 1999 Mr. Rahu Sarath-Chandra became the first president of the newly established Buddhist Council of Queensland (BCQ) and, as there was obviously an interest in Buddhism at the schools, he wanted the teaching of Buddhism in those schools to be more appropriately organized. The teaching continued with the help of subsequent presidents of the BCQ but it wasn't until 2007, with the enthusiastic contribution to the teaching from Mrs. Kwee Choo Ong and Mr. John Cartwright, that Buddhist Education Services for Schools (BESS) was established. Mr. Cartwright became the first president of BESS and when he retired, Mr. Tanuja Sarath-Chandra took over the role.

The main objectives of the association included the provision of volunteer teachers to impart Dharma-based knowledge and skills to enable students to lead positive and meaningful lives, thereby contributing positively to the society and environment they live in. These remain the prime objectives today. BESS made contact with several schools in regard to teaching Buddhism to their students and the opportunity to have these classes in school was mostly well received, with all the Buddhist teachers then formally coming under the umbrella of BESS in 2008.

A syllabus with monthly lesson topics from years 1 to 12 was introduced, making it easier for new teachers and to providing consistency across teaching material and methods of teaching. Mrs. Kwee Choo Ong assembled a large collection of course material, which is currently being reviewed and updated.

A deductible Gift Fund was set up by Venerable Sugathasara when she was president and the organisation was sustained through the generosity of key supporters and remains so today. The funds, then, as now, were used for a variety of purposes, including the purchase, production and distribution of teaching materials, reimbursement of travel expenses to teachers as needed, and insurance costs.

BESS is essentially an organized service committed to the promotion of non-denominational Buddhism, the Dharma, in government schools under the legal provisions of the Australian government, with the intention of enabling every school age child to learn Buddhism at a level appropriate to their age and with their parent's consent. It is currently represented in 16 schools in and around Brisbane and as it does not have its own premises, Dharma centres, temples and local libraries are used for its meetings and training purposes. BESS remains closely connected to the Buddhist Council the Queensland and Queensland Sangha Association.

At the present time we are actively growing our base of non-teaching members who have so many skills that will support the work of propagating the Dharma in the west. BESS is not simply an association of teachers, it is a vibrant community of Buddhists who represent many schools and traditions of Buddhism present in this part of Queensland, both from the Pali, Sanskrit and Vajrayana traditions. We work together in a myriad of ways and in complete harmony, to teach the Dharma in an appropriate and non-sectarian way to the next generation of western Buddhists.

If you feel that you would like to support our work, please consider becoming a member, Contact us through infobess@gmail.com and see what opportunities there are and although our website is being modernized, there is more information there, www.bessqld.com.au.

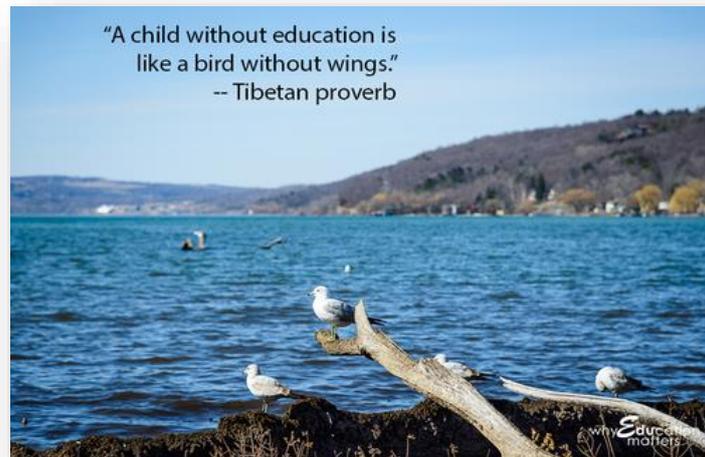
If you have children at a government school, and would like them to benefit from the lessons, speak to the school and tell them what you want for your child. If they are able to consider adding Buddhist lessons to their RI curriculum, they can contact BESS for help in providing that service.

Thank you for reading this article. Venerable Tseten

Any errors, or omissions from the original, are entirely my responsibility.



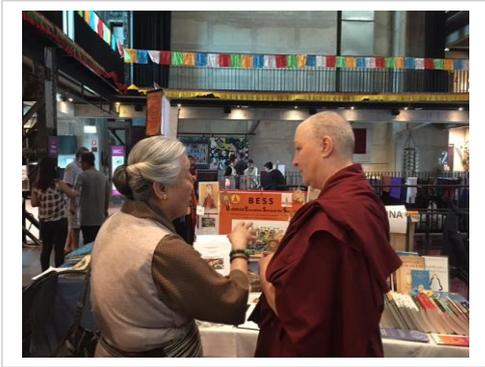
BESS at the Festival of Tibet



This was a first for the Buddhist Education Services for Schools, in terms of promoting our work, when we were present at the amazing Festival of Tibet in April this year. We were given a small table to show our poster and decorated it with examples of the children's work from the schools. Our fabulous volunteer teachers gave up their time in a roster to cover the entire week-end and we talked and talked to the hundreds of visitors who wandered around the stalls. I don't think that one person had actually heard of the work we do and many were very interested, with some signing up to receive our newsletter and keep in touch. In fact, we have recruited two new teachers from that one week-end.

The busiest times would be when the crowds who came in the early evening to attend the shows spent a while enjoying the colourful stalls all around the Power-House at New Farm Park for a while , also enjoying a glass of wine before the entertainment started.

We knew that the sister of His Holiness the Dalai Lama was to fly in from Dharamsala just to be at the festival and support the Tibetans living in exile in Brisbane, but we did not know that she would also walk around the stalls and talk to everyone. What a joy.



The picture shows Ama Jetsun Pema visiting our stall and talking animatedly to Venerable Tseten about teaching the Dharma in western schools.

She was very enthusiastic, taking all of our flyers and examples of the children's work with her. Venerable dares to hope that all of those papers are now in the hands of His Holiness.

This was a great thrill for all of us who worked so hard all week-end and nearly lost our voices!

This being our first foray into promoting BESS, we were all quite nervous about how we would perform, but I would say that we did very well indeed. We amazed ourselves and we will do even better next time.

A huge thank you from Venerable Tseten to all who did so much to make this a success.



The Buddha's Birthday

Vesak or Saka Dawa

This most important of Buddhist festivals is celebrated by all Buddhists, of all traditions around the world and in many different ways. The festival will always be either in Spring or Autumn, depending upon where in the world you live, on the day of the full moon in May. They all have the common bond of celebrating the life and teachings of the teacher, Shakyamuni Buddha. The word Vesak, or Wesak, derives from the name of the lunar month in the Hindu calendar and for Tibetan Buddhists, Dawa means month and Saka is a particularly bright star at that time of year.

Generally this is considered to be a birthday celebration but in fact it combines the three central stages in the life of the Buddha, his birth at Lumbini, his enlightenment at Bodhi Gaya and his parinirvana at Kushinara. Although these three significant events traditionally all occurred in the same month, on the full moon, they were obviously separated by many years.

Depending upon the country, there are a number of different traditions for Vesak. For example, in Thailand and Indonesia special lanterns, made from paper and wood, are hung from trees and houses with a light illuminating from the inside. The Chinese create large and colourful dragons that are paraded down the streets and in Sri Lanka there are huge light festivals with extravagant firework displays. The holiday of Vesak focuses upon giving to others and many will make generous offerings to the sick and poor or simply help a neighbour or friend in need; a way to

spread happiness and consider others less fortunate. In many traditionally Buddhist countries, Vesak is a public holiday, sometimes for two or three days.

One custom that is common to many Buddhist traditions though is called 'Bathing the Baby Buddha.' It is interesting to note that whilst acknowledging the Buddha's birthday, at his birth most traditions consider that the Buddha was not a Buddha, that title being conferred at his enlightenment. Before that he is considered to have been a Bodhisattva.

Buddhists visit their temples, taking offerings for the monastics whilst performing the ceremony of Bathing the Baby Buddha. It is a way to show respect for the Buddha and a chance to celebrate new beginnings for oneself.

BESS has been able to bring the custom of Bathing the Baby Buddha to many of its young students over the years, and this year the ceremony was performed at two schools and the children were quite enthralled by the ritual.

The library at Indooroopilly SS was the ideal place for bathing the Buddha and the children there for their lunch time reading were intrigued by the statue of the little baby Buddha standing on the table on a beautiful Nepalese cloth surrounded by lights and flowers and bowls of offerings. The children received the offerings afterwards.

The children became quiet as they concentrated on the words:



May I be well

May I be happy

May I be kind



May everyone be well

May everyone be happy

May everyone be kind



These words symbolize purifying their unkind thoughts, speech and actions, and the children said them as they poured water over the baby Buddha three times.

This was their new beginning, to recognize that they could make these aspirations for themselves and everyone else, and, most importantly, to understand that they could help to bring them about.

The ceremony was repeated at West End School in Brisbane and the children were equally entranced by the practice, understanding that they were sending out good wishes for the health and well-being of both themselves and every living being in the world. They understood that their own kind thoughts, kind words and kind deeds always affect, not just themselves, but everybody.

Venerable Tseten



Dana

Dana is a Sanskrit and Pali word that indicates the virtue of generosity, charity or of giving alms. It can also be philanthropic, public projects that empower and help many, or of giving to an individual in distress or need, financial or physical.

Bhikkhu Bodhi stated that "the practice of giving is universally recognised as one of the most basic human virtues" (Bodhi, 1995.) It is a quality that affirms the depth of one's humanity. In Buddha's teaching, the practice of giving is emphasised over and over again as the foundation and seed of spiritual development. When the Buddha talked to a new audience, he would focus upon the value of giving long before introducing other virtues such as morality and patience.

Generosity is one of the essential steps of Buddhist practice, creating positive karma and giving the donor a feeling of spiritual wealth, calm and well-being. Indeed, a Bodhisattva can take the perfection of giving to the ultimate degree by donating their limbs and even their lives for the benefit of those in need. The quality of the donor's motivation, the gratitude of the recipient and the kind and size of the gift, all contribute to the amount of merit gained.

Generosity is associated with wisdom, both in the intention and the act if it is done with an altruistic intention and open-hearted humanity. This means that whoever is in need, whatever the need is, is worthy of dana, as long as it is appropriate to the need. There is no merit in giving a starving family with many small children, an empty plate. And so the gift that is given, material or immaterial, must be appropriate and the Buddha said that the greatest gift is the gift of the Dharma. This can be to support those who teach the Dharma, the highest kind of generosity, but there are other ways, such as dharma books for the teaching, a room where teaching can happen or donations to temples or Dharma centres. The gift does not have to be financial, there is always the gift of time, helping at temple with whatever is needed to keep it running smoothly, or donating time or money to a hospice or various welfare organizations.

Dana is the first of the ten parameters, the perfections, which happen to be the subject of our class curriculum over the next two terms, together with the Bodhisattva concept.

Thank you for reading this and any errors are entirely my responsibility. Venerable Tseten

My Journey as a BESS Teacher

By Petra Depalo

I have been asked to write a short account of how I became involved with the Buddhist Education for State Schools. It has been a Journey that started approximately 10 years ago. A few of us (not actual Teachers) were approached at the time to become involved with teaching Primary School Children Buddhism.

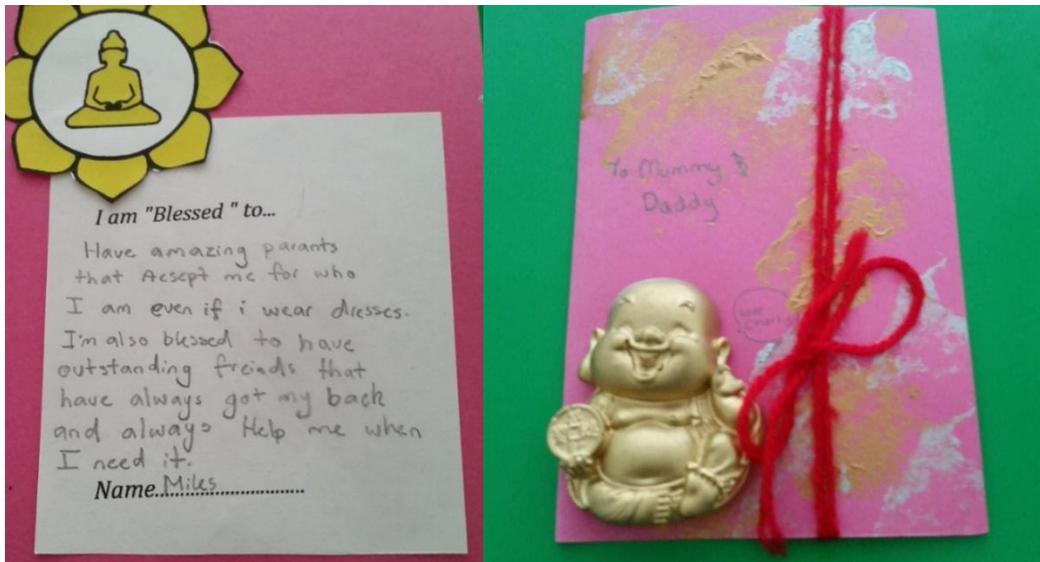
Although initially concerned about my lack of teaching ability, it has been a most enjoyable and rewarding experience. We were given a lot of support and Guidance from a few dedicated Individuals who made BESS a reality. Today the support is even greater than it was in the early days and I can only say if you love Children, this is a most wonderful way to spend an hour a week.



Each school where we are able to present Buddhism allows us half hour session once a week. We aim to expose the Children to the Teachings of the Buddha in a way that is age appropriate and concentrate on Mindfulness, Buddhist Ethics and Moral Values as told by the Buddha. Teachings of the Four Noble Truths, the Eight Fold Path and the Ten Perfections are some of the Topics covered.

The Children are able to reaffirm their Lessons with some sort of Activity that relates to the Lesson. Around the time of Buddha's Birthday we may make a Vesak Card or they create Messages to their Families expressing their Gratitude for being part of the Family. Create Bodhi Leaf Bookmarks

from original Bodhi Leaves reminding the Children that the Buddha gained Enlightenment under a Bodhi Tree and I do hope that in the Future (with and influx of new Members and Teachers) BESS will be able to be present at most Schools throughout Brisbane and the Gold Coast.



Message to family by student

Buddha card for parents



Workshop description by Carole Wakerley

BESS Teacher's Meeting 27/5/18, we welcomed Carol Khan for an Arts and Crafts demonstration. The theme was a Tibetan Mantra to the 5 Dhyani Buddhas and explaining the meaning of "Om Mani Padme Hum".

We made Mani stones and very artistically painted "Om" on them in gold and silver metallic paint.

- CHANT: "Om Mani Padme Hum" helps give compassion and wisdom.
- OM: Sound of the Universe felt through the core of our body
- STONES: Choose one that we feel affinity with and relate to, it is a belief. Stones are not inert, they have a spirit.

METALLIC COLOURS: Gold and silver are precious metals.

This activity is a great one for our teachers to bring to the students in Buddhist classes

We also welcomed Venerable Drolker who hopes to start teaching training with BESS soon.



And finally, for this time:



Our wonderful volunteer teachers at a BESS teacher training session

These sessions are held every term when relevant presentations on teaching styles and classroom management keep us all up-to-date. Shared experience and knowledge and working out teaching strategies are invaluable in maintaining continuity in the curriculum and the high teaching standards that we set.

Sharing the Dharma with the children is truly an extraordinary experience that each teacher is passionate about. If this newsletter has inspired you and you now feel that you might be able to help in some way, perhaps as an amazing teacher, or an invaluable classroom assistant, (also a part of our mentoring programme for new teachers) or any other skill you think might be helpful in some way, please contact us at:

infobess@gmail.com

We look forward to hearing from you.

www.bessqld.com.au contains other relevant information and is in the process of being updated as part of our intention to present a more comprehensive view of BESS and its work. Please be patient.

Warmest regards from Venerable Tseten. President

This newsletter was compiled by Alex Seton and lightly edited by Venerable Tseten and Bojan Blatnik.

- ❖ The little gold Bodhi leaves used to separate each article were made by Petra Depalo, one of our longer serving teachers. They are made from true Bodhi tree leaves harvested from the Bodhi tree at Chung Tian Temple and are little master-pieces. All merit to Petra as they are indeed beautiful and excellent, very popular book-marks. We will make more I promise.
- ❖ Please note that you have received this newsletter as your name appears on our data base. If you do not wish to receive it in future, please let us know. On the other hand, if you know anyone who would like to receive it but is at present not on our data base, again, let us know. We do have some hard copies available & if you think they would be well received at your temple or Dharma centre, for wider distribution, we will arrange to get some to you.

Thank you.