

Buddhist Education Services for Schools Inc. (BESS)

**Promoting universal values for living together in peace and
harmony for the happiness, health, and prosperity of all**

SEPTEMBER 2023



BESS Newsletter September 2023

September 2023

From the Front Line

Term 3 is done and dusted, and our teachers have had much fun delivering the new lesson cycle. For Year 3 this has included the foundation lessons of The Four Truths, Eightfold Path, and Precepts, offering them a firm grounding for their future Buddhist classes.

These concepts in Buddhism can be tricky even for adults, and BESS has managed to develop lessons that bring the ideas to the children in ways that are applicable to their lives. The older students in the meantime have enjoyed learning about Super Brain, as demonstrated in the last newsletter and this has given them a new appreciation of meditation.

Each RI class is overseen by a paid member of the school staff who helps with managing the student's behaviour. We are very pleased to be able to say that all these supervising teachers in the RI class not only really enjoy and appreciate the lessons but participate, particularly with the meditations. The teachers are particularly impressed with the way the meditation to start a class really settles the children and often express the wish that this happened in their own classes.

BESS is growing, just a little at a time, and we have taken small steps to visit many of the Buddhist traditions to raise the profile of BESS and the work we do in primary schools. This initiative is beginning to show results.

Members of the BESS community have now visited a few centres and been warmly welcomed by Ellen Grove Temple, Tzu Chi, and Dhammagiri Forest Hermitage. We look forward to reporting further developments on this front in the new year.

Mettacittena.

Venerable Tseten and Tracey Chin





Following the Four Truths and the Eightfold Path, in Term 3, we have been teaching the Five Precepts to Year 3. As we avoid talking about sexual misconduct or mind-altering substances for obvious reasons, we relied upon the skill of Thich Nhat Hanh’s words yet again. He described the third precept as ‘respect for all sentient beings’, and the concept of refraining from substances that

cloud the mind, to ‘taking care of my body and mind’ – respect for self. After each precept, the class is referred to the Eightfold Path and how each precept connects with each path. We have found this really reinforces in the students’ mind the interconnectedness of all that we do.



The Four Truths referred to dukkha as being a bumpy ride, and the students understand that life has its ups and downs, as illustrated by the cars in different ways. But it is not all doom and gloom and there is always sukka just around the corner. The bridge is sukka – the precepts -- the Buddha’s advice on how to avoid many of the bumps. What do we do when we fall

off the bridge? The water symbolizes dukkha, and the students can see that they can get back onto the bridge if they regret their actions and resolve to do better next time. There are always people to help them out of the water.



The third precept is The Golden Rule – Respect. Essentially, respect is the golden thread that runs through Buddhism and is emphasised strongly in the Precepts.

BESS makes it a point to use modern books, when possible, that appropriately highlight points that are central to the Buddha’s teachings. For respect we use the story of *Do Unto Otters*.

This book has been animated into a clever and engaging short film of the story of Mr Rabbit who has new neighbours, the otters. He has no idea how to

interact with them. He gradually learns from the wise owl that respect and consideration for others lead to cooperation, understanding, and friendship.

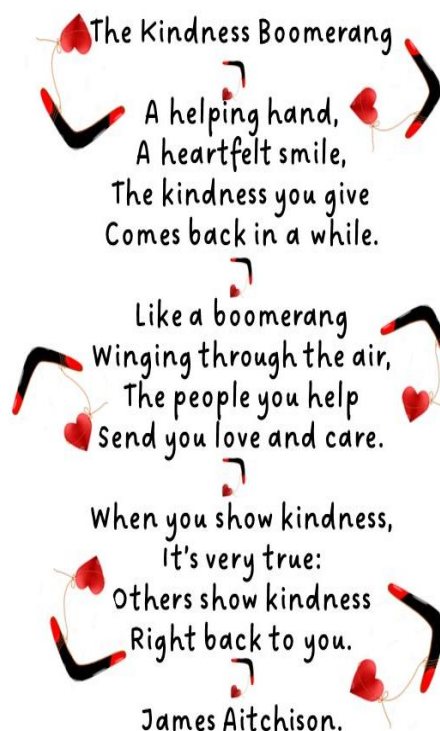
It is a great favourite with the students who always ask to watch it again. The very catchy soundtrack also means it gets stuck in your head for quite a while!

World Kindness Day: The BESS Approach

World Kindness Day is November 13th, 2023, and BESS has taken this opportunity to highlight how kindness affects every word we speak and action we take, and how our kind actions can 'boomerang' throughout every facet of the children's lives.

This two-week lesson will now become an annual recurring lesson around the International Day of Kindness, during Term 4. The video might be the same each year, unless a new one is produced, but in the 12 months since last seeing it, the students will notice something new each time and this should lead to more nuanced discussions as their capacity to understand it increases.

This lesson involves a great deal of class participation with discussion and worksheets. Teachers will organise the lessons according to the capacity of their class and time constraints.



James Aitchison is a well-known, prize-winning children's poet. A copy of this poem will be given to each student to put on the fridge!

TEACHERS' CORNER

As we teach, so we learn... here we aim to share some of our teachers' experiences with their students that often inspire us and makes us appreciate how much they mutually learn from each other. We will not identify any school in these stories, with each teacher sharing the wisdom of the Buddha in different schools.

Jeff Brunne, who teaches Year 5, was impressed how the young 'neuroscientists' in his class were able to see that training the brain (as with any other muscle of the body) could assist them in successfully delivering on all aspects of their motivation. They understand how an unfocused (monkey) mind that is jumping all over the place makes it more difficult to remember important things and make good decisions.

Debra Glavac teaches years 4, 5, and 6 and tells us that young twins in one class mentioned that that they had a birthday coming up, and it so happened the date coincided with Debra's! The following week of RI fell on the birthday, and when Debra arrived, she noticed a buzz in the room and Happy Birthday written on the white board.

The surprises kept coming – the supervising class teacher was standing by the door, and as she clapped her hands, a tuck-shop lady came in with a cupcake! The students sang Happy Birthday for Debra and brought her to tears! We don't know how she did it, but apparently, everyone managed to have a small portion of cake.

It is immensely gratifying for the teachers when their young students show their appreciation during special days, and this is one of the things to look forward to!

TEACHERS' MEETING

Our teachers are a tight knit group who meet at the end of each term to share experiences and discuss how our lessons worked. The feedback from these sessions is crucial to help the lesson development team fine-tune the delivery and content of the lessons. We also trial new activities that could be introduced to support future lessons. One particularly successful activity, which was enjoyed by both students and teachers, was pebble stacking which we did with several classes last year. This was a valuable lesson in mindful concentration and teamwork.



At our last meeting we practised with origami, the Japanese art of paper folding as a possible activity to foster mindfulness and meditation.

The teachers had a great time engaging their tactile senses and creating weird and wonderful things as we crafted what might have been boats, a heart, and a box.



We have not decided whether to adopt this activity for next year, but nonetheless, the teachers had a great time – no meditation was involved, but quite a lot of mindfulness and laughter.

Growing Compassionate Hearts Conference 2023

Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom. FDCW

BESS is delighted to invite you to register for the annual Growing Compassionate Hearts Conference 2023. In 1983 Lama Yeshe began to formulate the idea of Universal Education as he felt that western education today is out-of-date and can produce conflict and dissatisfaction. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has also spoken about universal education saying that there is more to learning than simply a way to get a good job. That we must also take care of the emotions and mind, learn how to build inner peace, and tackle destructive emotions. From this idea has grown the 16 Guidelines that BESS refers to quite often for our lesson development, and our teachers are given an e copy as a resource.

The aim of the FDCW conference is to share knowledge that ‘will equip children and young people with the skills for creating a kinder, wiser, more compassionate society’. It is an exciting opportunity to hear from a wide range of experienced educators and practice the methods that have proven effective for them.

Venerable Tseten has followed the conference over several years as we use and recommend the subjects that are presented as being so relevant to our work in BESS. Once you have registered, the presentations will be available on video later, which is invaluable for us here due to the time difference in Australia and London. This year Venerable is presenting an overview of our own *Super Brain is a Mindful Brain* lessons and will be on the first panel of the conference. Details are as follows:

Teaching Children Values, Compassion and Empathy

Tuesday October 10th - Wednesday October 11th, 2023

Registration is available online at FDCW conference 2023 – Growing Compassionate Hearts Conference.

News Hot off the Press

Movie: Looking for a Lady with Fangs and a Moustache
Date: November 30th
Time: 6.30pm.

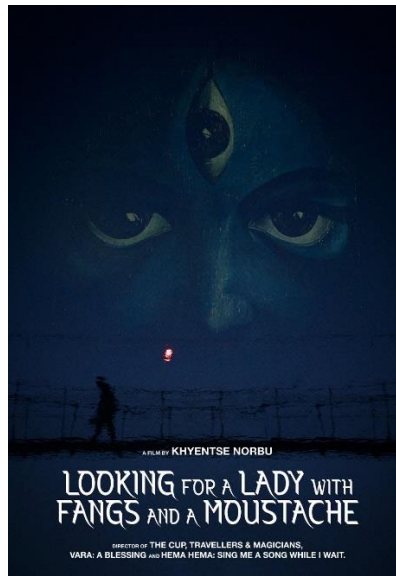
Venue: New Farm Cinema, 701 Brunswick St, New Farm QLD 4005

Tickets: \$25. Children free.

Following the successful screening of the movie *The Yak in the Classroom* earlier this year, BESS is following up with a 2021 film directed by Bhutan-born Khyentse Norbu, famed for his film *The Cup*. The latest production presents a completely different view of Buddhism, both culturally and spiritually. Some describe it as an absorbing spiritual and romantic journey, whilst others take it far more seriously, talking of near-death experiences and Dakinis.

Whichever way we experience it, it is provocative and visually arresting with amusing metaphors that will keep you thinking for some time.

BESS hopes to continue offering films from time to time that represent many different aspects of Buddhism and from all over the world. We would be pleased to accept suggestions of suitable movies from you. Please send your suggestions through bess.info.qld@gmail.com



Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter. BESS hopes that you have found it informative and interesting. Please share it with anyone who you think is interested in our work.

We apologise if you have received it by mistake, and if you no longer wish to receive it, please let us know at the usual email address - bess.info.qld@gmail.com .

With mettacittena
Tracey Chin
Editor