

**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**

**AUGUST 2023**



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## BESS Newsletter AUGUST 2023

### President's Message

The year is flying by, and we are well into term 2 already. Lessons are being delivered at various stages in every school as the new lesson cycle continues to be incorporated into the schedule. Teachers are managing the sometimes-last minute changes with great patience, and it all comes out in the wash at teachers' meetings, where there is always an enthusiastic sharing of experiences.

We all feel refreshed and reinvigorated after the discussions and a very good lunch, and an article in this newsletter about the latest meeting offers some of the activities we get up to.

Following the success of the movie night in June, and the many compliments received on the beautiful film, the committee is pleased to announce that there will be another Buddhist film later in the year, again at the New Farm cinema. Films that fit the Buddhist 'mould' in one way or another, whether obviously so with little explanation required, or discreetly causing us to think deeply, are strangely not at the top of cinema listings!

Much research has therefore gone on behind the scenes to bring to the screen films that are relevant to our beliefs and world view, and it is hoped that some will make the audience think very deeply indeed, whilst others are pure enjoyment. Watch this space, or BESS Facebook, for the announcement.

Earlier this year, the Education Department Queensland released to each faith group, the numbers of students enrolled into each group involved with RI. This is a new initiative from the department, and I was very surprised, and enormously thrilled, that nearly 2,600 students in government schools are enrolled into RI if it is offered in their school.

However, the thrill became a little sadness as currently BESS reaches only 400 of the 2600, and I wondered how we might be able to reach out to more of the students over time. This will require BESS to grow, just a little at a time, and we need to start with small steps, understanding that our work is not widely known in the general Buddhist diaspora.

Therefore, a small group of BESS members has been visiting some of the Buddhist communities in and around Brisbane, introducing ourselves and our Dharma work in schools to raise awareness and interest, and attract new members.

Meeting diverse Buddhist traditions in their temples or Dharma Centres is an amazing opportunity to learn more about each other, and as BESS is non-sectarian, and has many members from several traditions, I hope you will agree that we all learn from each other in our own small community.

With metta

## LESSON DEVELOPMENT

By Venerable Tseten

### The Buddha's first lesson. The Four Truths.

Sometimes everybody has  
problems in their lives.

Problems are called dukkha

and

there is a reason that this happens,

and

a way to stop them.



Each year, the new Year 3 students joining Buddhist RI receive this teaching to start their journey in Buddhism through to year 6. By then they should have a general, all-round understanding of who the Buddha was and his teachings, and how those teachings are relevant to their lives today. At the centre of the Four Truths is dukkha, and the Buddha's own skilful means of teaching to his audience's capacity is supported by BESS for the students in our classes.



Robert Thurman, a prominent Buddhologist, explains that the Buddha used the word dukkha to mean unsatisfactory. As suffering is rather a complex concept for students to understand, we follow the Buddha's example. Dukkha is the name for the hole in a wheel for the axle, a name still used today as it was during Buddha's time. If the axle doesn't fit well, it's a very uncomfortable journey -- unsatisfactory and requiring some work. His audience would understand immediately, as do ours.



The students understand the bumpy ride of dukkha and we emphasise that there are ups and downs in life, and so between the dukkha bumps we do of course have lots of sukkha, very nice things, happening. This is simplistic but it leads on to the Eightfold Path and the Five Precepts, and so the lessons will develop slowly to unravel the entire wisdom of the teachings.



To illustrate the third Truth, that it is our anger, greed and ignorance that causes our dukkha, these pictures speak the reasons loud and clear. The students learn that they have choices -- to be angry or not, to be generous or not, and to pay close attention to their teachers and elders. Discussion is encouraged in the classroom, and the students then begin to see how they might make a difference if they think before they speak and act. Something for us all to think about!



It is important that the students also understand that these lessons are not easy, that everyone must take the responsibility for their own intentions, actions, and speech. However, we do not labour the point, endeavouring to lighten the idea with Peanuts – we were all pleased the classes knew who this was!

### SCHOOL EVENTS

Each year, we plan a fun activity for the students to reinforce their understanding of Buddhist practice and how to apply it to their lives. Last year, we conducted the highly enjoyable pebble stacking, a mindfulness practice to cultivate a focused and quiet mind.

This time, we will introduce the students to *Enso* painting – a Zen practice that involves drawing a circle in one fluid, expressive stroke using an ink brush. In Zen Buddhism, the *Enso* represents freedom, concentration, and attention to the present moment.

The circular shape also symbolises connectedness, closed body, emptiness, or fullness. Once the *Enso* is drawn, it does not change -- the focus is on finishing rather than on quality.

At this year’s Buddha’s Birthday celebration at schools, we gave the students each an *Enso* drawing on a bodhi leaf in their party packs. We thought we would reinforce this learning by engaging them in making their own.



Through this, the students learn to apply conscious efforts that symbolise presence, concentration, and mindful breathing – **you only get one go**. Jeff Brunne, one of our teachers, is a Zen practitioner, and he helped to organise a practice run with paint brushes and paper at our last Teachers’ Meeting. We had great fun and learnt a lot from this practice – as we hope the students will.

This is a lovely reflection of our non-denominational and non-sectarian approach to our lesson plans which aim to embrace elements from all traditions.



## Teachers Contributions

By Debra Glavac



On my recent trip to Thailand, I was lucky enough to be invited to a monastery outside Bangkok to attend a special open day, with Sangha from different countries (Not having any Thai language I was lucky my Vietnamese neighbour could translate for me)

The meditation was THE ELEPHANT – ‘clear state of mind’. To say I was inspired is an understatement! I have always had a connection to the Thai elephant but now I understand the spiritual nature of this magnificent being.

I decided to adapt this meditation for my students. It is visual – students were shown a photo of an elephant, and tactile –each was provided with an elephant soft toy to hold and touch.

Meditation requires complete mindfulness on the task. As the student holds the elephant in their left hand, they feel the different body parts with right hand, whilst visualising: Is your elephant strong and sturdy, or fragile and fine? Are the legs strong and sure footed, can they carry the weight of the body? Are the eyes kind, gentle and wise?

In Buddhism the elephant represents a mighty, powerful strength to remove obstacles with wisdom and kindness. I explained that they lived in herds, looked after each other, were kind, respectful and protective. They are thinkers, have long memories and are very wise.

I then asked the class before opening their eyes to think: does that sound like a good Buddhist? Should we all be like an elephant? Open your eyes.

The silence was deafening, the reactions were: “wow”, “I got it” “how can that be” “I didn’t have one cloud, just my elephant”. The discussion that followed was very lively – they covered the qualities of a Buddha and how to put what they have learnt into practice, but also to be mindful and aware of what nature is teaching us -- a fantastic lesson.

## TEACHER PROFILE

**Jeff Brunne** joined BESS last year after a long and successful career with the Queensland Government where he managed various programmes until his retirement in 2020. He is a strong advocate for peace, the environment, and human rights.

He is now committed to using his skills and experience to make the most difference he can to fellow Australians of all ages and walks of life. Jeff has been particularly drawn to teaching and mentoring young people. He strongly believes, like the young student from the film *Yunana: A Yak in the Classroom*, that teachers have the good fortune to 'touch the future'.

With his interest in Buddhism, Jeff became an honours student of Asian religions at the University of Queensland. He settled on Zen practice and was fortunate enough to work closely with a Zen Master for over 20 years. However, he finds all Buddhist traditions appealing and provide much food for thought and the soul.

In mid-2022, Jeff resigned his committee role at the Royal Historical Society of Queensland to move into a more 'hands on' teaching role. The very same day, he came across BESS's advertisement for Buddhist teachers through Volunteering Queensland – it seemed a wonderful opportunity to merge his twin passions of working with students and Buddhism.

After completing the mentorship program with Venerable Tseten, Lyna Chen and Tracey Chin, Jeff started teaching his own Grade 3 and 5 classes in West End State School this year. He notices how much the students enjoy their Buddhism classes because of the thoughtful lesson plans that leave space for fun and discussion. But more than that, Buddhism invites and empowers the listener to consider the Dharma and learn from it what they can.

Jeff has been inspired by how much his students have contributed to the lessons, even as he continues to learn 'on the job' how to communicate with them on deep matters. He finds one instance particularly inspiring and highlights the challenges and rewards of sharing the Dharma with young people.

Jeff was sharing a story about meditation. One of the students went back to her desk to write and colour on a piece of paper. Initially, Jeff was going to call her back but realised that young students often learn best using their hands creatively, so held his peace. At the end of the lesson, she handed Jeff an illustrated card which explained how much she loved Buddhism and realised that her "mind is like the sky" - which was exactly the point of the lesson.

What a deep realisation for an eight-year-old child! What an immense joy that was for Jeff!

Thank you to everyone for taking the time to read this newsletter. BESS hopes that you have found it informative and interesting. If you wish to support the work we do, please consider becoming a general member, or a teacher. Please share this with anyone who you may 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 [bess.info.qld@gmail.com](mailto:bess.info.qld@gmail.com).

With metta  
Tracey Chin  
*Editor*