



## Buddhist Sangha of Bucks County

Meeting at the Yardley Friends Meeting, 65 North Main Street, Yardley, PA, 7pm Mondays

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### ANNUAL REPORT 2017

The Mission of the Buddhist Sangha of Bucks County is: *To Present, Teach and Practice Buddhism, and to Provide Meditation Instruction and Community Service in a Manner Consistent with the Teaching of the Buddha.*

Our Sangha represents a safe space for us to investigate these teachings, and come to our own understanding and acceptance of what is true, letting that understanding guide our process of continuous transformation.

Working together, we support the desire to awaken our deepest understanding of life through meditation practice, dharma discussions, and opportunities for compassionate service.

This has been a year of continued growth for our Sangha. We welcomed the addition of eight new members. The year featured a wide range of visiting teachers from the Theravada and Mahayana traditions. We started the year with what has become a traditional New Year's Eve mini-retreat with Jeanne Reis and BSBC founder James Reis, a lovely way to honor this tradition with calmness and joy.

Our core teacher in the Tibetan tradition, Yogi Acharya Lama Gursam, on the left in the picture below, honored us with a dharma talk and retreat on the Four Immeasurables in April and visited again in August for a special Monday evening talk on meditation practice.

Rebecca Li from the Dharma Drum Chan tradition (pictured on the right below) also visited us twice, presenting dharma teachings on 'Embracing Life's Ups and Downs with Equanimity' in February, and on 'Patience, Endurance, and the Chan Practice' in October.



In March, Princeton Buddhist Meditation Group teacher Beverly Sanford offered us a wonderful talk in the Tibetan tradition on 'The Precepts, The Paramitas, and Everyday Life As Practice.' Theravadin teacher Chipamong Chowdhury graced us with a full day

compassion retreat in August (pictured below). Zen teacher Andre Teasan Halaw paid us a return visit in September with a talk on 'If Only I Had a Self.'



A new vehicle for sharing the dharma with the BSBC this year was using the internet for virtual teachings. In April, Timber Hawkeye addressed the topic 'Pain Is Inevitable, Suffering Is Optional' from his car in a National Park parking lot! And in May, George Haas provided guidance on 'The Meaningful Life,' combining Theravadin practice with attachment theory. We were lucky enough to have George return in person in October, courtesy of his student, and BSBC member Philip Murphy, to talk about 'Valuating Spiritual Maturity.'

Three standing committees were created by the BSBC board as part of the bylaws revision two years ago. The committee structure has helped to organize our activities and spread responsibilities among our group of dedicated and talented board and general members and friends of the Sangha, who all pitch in to make our community function to benefit all.

Communications Committee: (Co-chairs: Eugene Pevzner, K.C. Focht, & Joe Beck, with assistance from Marc Kaye). The committee continued to increase the BSBC's visibility on digital platforms. Contributions by several members and friends appeared regularly on our website and Facebook page, and a new Twitter account was established. Special events received special treatment through traditional means as well, through advertising in local news outlets, and creating and posting flyers. The

results of these efforts are visible, as it has become common for two or three newcomers to appear on Monday nights, many having learned of us through social media.

K.C. Focht has structured and taken on authorship of the BSBC weekly e-newsletter, our primary communications vehicle to members for many years, expanding a model that Susan Harrison left us with as she stepped down from the board to pursue serious retirement travel. Eugene and Joe engineered our virtual teachings project expertly, and Eugene continued to create an increasingly robust website with audio recordings available for many of our visiting teacher's offerings.

Program Committee: (Co-chairs: Lauren Phelps, David Clark, & Janet Weathers, with assistance from Edna Telep, Dave Mermelstein, Judy Henderson, and myself). We have studied the Buddha's teachings and related practices and traditions through the many visiting teachers enumerated above, through the book group hosted by board member Edna Telep, and members Jeff and Roseanne MacNair, and through our weekly discussions. Many board members led discussions, with special thanks to Janet, David, and Dave for their many offerings, along with contributions from Joe Beck and members Marc Kaye, Lauren Phelps, and Philip Murphy.

We brought greater coherence to our weekly discussions of the dharma by focusing on specific themes or topic areas. Some of the main themes included Sila and the five precepts; wisdom in practice, the Parami of Panna; a focus on the Parami of Khanti, or patience, and a series on meditation practice, done with assistance from member Lowell Arye.

We completed our exploration of Shantideva's poem "A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life" with the able assistance of Lama Gursam's senior student, John Wenz, who comes six times a year to lead our discussions. In addition to contributing to our meditation series by regaling us with his personal practice history, John helped us dig into the Ganges Mahamudra of the 11<sup>th</sup> century tantric Mahasiddha, Tilopa, considered the founder of the Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. We are grateful both for John's continuing support of the BSBC, and for his considering us when arranging Lama Gursam's complex travel schedule.

Outreach and Service Committee: (Co-chairs: Rika Barrett and Leslie Morgan, assisted by Marilyn Picciotti and K.C. Focht). We have continued our outreach and service activities through contributions to the Bucks County Emergency Homeless Shelter, organized by Rika, who strategically targets our contributions in response to the expressed needs of the shelter.

The BSBC joined with 21 other local congregations when the Family Promise program opened its doors to help homeless and low-income families in lower Bucks County to achieve sustainable independence. Before the program ended this spring, we served as a support group to our assigned host congregation, the Lutheran Church of God's Love in Newtown. We provided fellowship and support for the families while in residence at the church, which included some overnight stays by a few devoted members. Participating BSBC members and friends were: K.C. Focht, Edna Telep, Diana Collinelli, David Clark, Yvonne Matienko, Vanessa Persicketti, Janet Weathers, and myself.



We continued our 15-year long tradition of participating in Pennsylvania's road clean-up program, collecting trash along our designated highway in Levittown, in the fall and spring, organized by member Lina Blanchet, whose article on the fall clean-up, 'Loving Kindness for Litterbugs,' was picked up and published online by the popular Buddhist magazine, *Lion's Roar*. (See the picture above of some of the fall clean-up crew.)

The committee also made others aware of our presence in the community by hosting a table at the annual Yardley Harvest Fair in September. Eugene, Rika, K.C., Leslie, and I all helped man our booth (see below).



We also continued to bring awareness of Buddhist teachings and our presence in the area through four

invited contributions for the *Bucks County Courier Times* column, From a Faith Perspective, written by board member and treasurer, Edna Telep, and myself. A few of us responded to an invitation from Linda Jacobs, the clerk of the Yardley Meeting, and attended events they provided, including a memorable talk by psychologist Dan Gottlieb on ‘Cultivating Compassion in a World That Seems Inhumane’ in March, and two potluck discussions on ‘Talking & Listening with Compassion.’

Louise Wile, our librarian, has updated our lending library that provides many Buddhist books, periodicals, DVDs, tapes, and audio books. The initiative led by Dave Mermelstein to expand the library by purchasing multiple copies of key books on Buddhism recommended by board members continued this year, and we received contributions of additional resources from other donors as well.

A new addition to our services this year has been the creation of a weekly mindfulness program for children, ages 6-12, under the inspired guidance of member Diana Collenelli. Besides enabling caregivers to join us in the meditation hall while their children are well attended to, it is a great joy to see and hear the chatter and laughter emerging from Diana’s room.

A special event this fall was the reinstatement of an old BSBC social gathering – seasonal picnics. Judy Henderson organized the fall picnic at Core Creek Park in Langhorne, and a good time was had despite the fact that publicity about the event reached some park wasps that loved the energy in our food display (see the picture below).



Financially, we ended the year with a balance of approximately \$5,500 as seen in Figure 1. These expenses included payment for our rent for the year based on \$90 per Monday evening and special events at the Yardley and Makefield Friends Meeting Houses. Thanks to our treasurer, Edna Telep, for handling the expenses and records with both caution and a spirit of generosity.

Figure 1 - BSBC FY 2017 Financial Statement

<b>BSBC FISCAL YEAR 2017 (Nov 1 to Oct 31)</b>	
<b>FINANCIAL REPORT OF INCOME / EXPENSES</b>	
Balance from FY 2016 (corrected)	\$5,512
Income	\$8,451
Expenses	Rent: \$4,770 Retreats: 1,300 Insurance 334 Donations 525 Purchases 1,492 <b>TOTAL \$8,421</b>
Approximate Balance in Account (pending outstanding deposits & expenses)	<b>\$5,542</b>

Finally, a fond farewell to long-time BSBC members Bill and Trudie Regan. Bill has been a stalwart on the board for more than six years, and the couple’s warm and appreciative presence, self-deprecating humor, and insightful comments have always been a welcome part of our community. We wish them well as they transition to a relaxed and safe life near their daughter in New York.

We look to the coming year to continue the growth of our Sangha, welcoming teachers to deepen our understanding of Buddhist teachings while expanding practice and service opportunities for our members and friends. All are truly welcome.

I am grateful for the opportunity to have served in a leadership role for the Buddhist Sangha of Bucks County for the past three years, and greatly appreciate the ready and willing assistance from so many who have made this past year so valuable and memorable as we travel this path together.

-- Phil Brown, President