



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 2019

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.*

The Buddhist Sangha of Bucks County is a community of spiritual friends practicing the Dharma together. It's a place we go each week to support each other in our practice and in our struggle to end (or limit) the suffering in our lives. Thich Nhat Hanh describes a Sangha as more than a supportive community, but as a deep spiritual practice.

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

The year began with our traditional New Year's Eve retreat with Jeanne Reis and BSBC founder James Reis. Once again, we shared an evening celebrating the Dharma as a sangha with guided meditations from Jeanne mixed with silent & walking meditations along with a period of sharing poems, stories and personal experiences.

Our long-time teacher in the Tibetan tradition, Lama Gursam, was not able to join us in person over the course of the last year. His father passed away, so Lama remained with his family to provide support. We do look forward to being with Lama again soon to receive his wonderful teachings and presence. He is scheduled for a weekend retreat at YFM on 11/29 & 11/30; the topic is "How to Love Oneself and Others in These Challenging Times."

As is always the case our Sangha embraced change and 2019 was no different. We saw a few members step down from their previous roles and we saw new members step up to enrich the spirit of our Sangha. Moira continued to lead all our programming efforts with support from Dave Mermelstein. Once again, BSBC programming delivered tremendous depth, creating rich programs that progressed throughout the course of the year, further developing our practice & understanding of the Dharma. In addition, the sangha further developed our connections with truly skillful teachers from various traditions.

In the Winter of 2019, we had Bodhipaksa lead a Monday evening. He is a member of the Triratna Buddhist Order, founder of the wildmind.org and a long-time Buddhist practitioner. His guided meditation and Dharma talk were inspirational and followed a Q&A. In

March, Padma & Elaine hosted a weekend retreat at their Blue Sky Refuge in Stockton, with several members of BSBC in attendance. The retreat was an exploration of the Buddha's teaching on satipatthana or mindfulness as a path to liberation from suffering.



During the month of March, we managed to beam Stephen Proctor into the Yardley Friends Meetinghouse from the other side of the globe. We had a full house for those sessions as Stephen is truly a gifted teacher. His teachings were crystal clear and practical. The topic of the series we covered was Mindfulness in Daily Living. Several members have continued to closely follow Stephen's teachings.

In April, we had Rebecca Li back. Rebecca spoke on "Why do we sit?" Following this, we explored together the goals of our meditation practice and our study of the Buddhadharma, and what it means in our lives.



Lucinda Green has been practicing the Dharma for 50+ years and is presently teaching in Colorado. Phil Brown introduced us to her during his exploratory time spent out West. We had a virtual visit with her on one of our Monday evenings. Then Lucinda travelled to PA and led us in a day of developing and deepening concentration and insight, leading to true happiness and freedom from suffering. It was held at Makefield Friends Meetinghouse.

Also, in April, the sangha's good friend John Wentz came for a visit. John is Lama Gursam's student and guide when he visits the US. His teaching was stories from Patrul Rinpoche, author of the Tibetan classic Words of My Perfect Teacher. John's stories were heart-felt & inspiring & motivated us all to recognize that our ego can not be at the center of our life, rather to recognize the teaching in every situation, and the value of truly listening in detail to what *everyone* brings to our interactions.

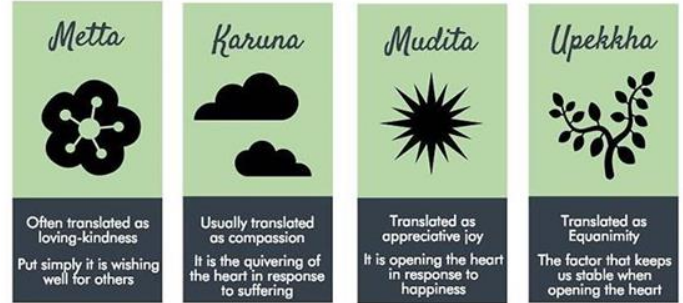
The former leadership of BSBC has a history of packing up and moving on. Phil Brown, sadly, carried that tradition on; a lesson on aniccā. In May, he began packing up his Morrisville home of forty some years and headed to Colorado Springs. We were fortunate to have a lovely farewell celebration with many BSBC members; Phil even passed along a few of his possessions which weren't going to make the trek to his new home.



Phil has been greatly missed since his departure. He's truly a kind-hearted soul with immeasurable generosity and wisdom. He made significant improvements at BSBC and continues to impact the quality of our sangha. We all miss you dearly, Phil, and the amazing experiences and stories you have shared with us along Way.

As we've been known to do from time to time, we did a series based on a past article in Tricycle magazine, studying the brahmavihārās and karma. The

article was titled "Head & Heart Together" and was written by Thanissaro Bhikkhu, a Thai forest monk. The article teaches us how to combine wisdom with an open heart to cultivate compassion. Dave & Moira guided us through to get beyond a pure conceptual understanding of these terms and tap into our heart with guided meditations and exercises to experience and feel into these emotions.



On the first weekend in October, we had a Friday night & all-day Saturday retreat at YFM. The title of the retreat was understanding emptiness. Lowell Arye, a long-time Buddhist practitioner, led the Saturday sits and Dharma talks.

Our October Monday nights were spent with Zen Priest Sensei José Shinzen Palma. A teacher from a San Diego zendo. We did a 4-week video series on "How to be Selfless in a Selfish World" (from Tricycle). What a wonderful teacher. He skillfully shared his personal experience of discovering the Dharma and the progression of his sitting practice. He highlighted the importance of getting to know our minds and, when observing such, of the care necessary to support each of our own experiences. In his case, he recognized the need for a therapist to support him with some of what was coming up for him as he sat, and he emphasized the skillfulness of this awareness in order to properly manage our own mental health and our practice. Each of these talks were followed by lively discussions amongst the members and guests.



Over the summer, we learned from another teacher well versed in the area of mental health, Michael Stone. We covered his video series titled "Finding Stability in Turbulence: Meditating When Things Get Tough" (from Tricycle). Michael's direct, easy to follow

language & style was refreshing. He pulled from common examples. His approach of combining Buddhist techniques with psychology & psychotherapy was insightful & practical. Moira did such a skillful job of introducing Michael to us as she had past experiences with him. Overall, the series was well received.

The book club has continued to thrive, serving as another vehicle for providing the BSBC family with a warm, personal environment in which to explore carefully selected books each year.

Three standing committees were created by the BSBC board as part of the bylaws revision four 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: (Chair: Eugene Pevzner, with support from K.C. Focht). The committee focuses on BSBC's visibility on digital platforms. Contributions by several members and friends appeared regularly on our website and Facebook page. Special events received special treatment through traditional means as well as through advertising in local news outlets, creating & posting flyers.

Eugene has been at the helm of the BSBC weekly e-newsletter, our primary communications vehicle to members for many years. We've recently added the capability to accept online donations from our website. In addition, we can now use a card reader to accept payments on Monday nights or for retreats which is an added convenience to members and guests.

Program Committee: (Chair: Moira Kowalczyk, with help from Dave Mermelstein & Eugene). We have studied the Buddha's teachings, the traditions through visiting teachers identified throughout this report; through several extensive month-long programs targeted at a variety of Buddhist topics, and through the book club hosted by board member Edna Telep, and members Jeff & Roseanne MacNair. Special thanks to Moira for providing consistent leadership over the entire course of the year, developing a year-long program and delivering quality discussions 51 weeks out of the year is no small feat.

Outreach and Service Committee: (Co-chairs: Rich Kelly & Ann Favaloro). We have continued our outreach and service activities through contributions to the Bucks County Emergency Homeless Shelter, organized by Rich & Ann, who strategically target our

contributions in response to the expressed needs of the shelter.

The BSBC joined forces with the United Way of Bucks County in an active drive to support the 'Stuff the Bus' campaign. This program collects essential back to school items for Bucks County students.

The outreach & service committee is also working with Woody from Synergy to collect donations to help support their efforts working with our homeless youth in Bucks County.



We continued our 16-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 members. (See the picture above from the fall clean-up crew.)

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 Joe Beck. A few newcomers have referenced this as the source of learning about our sangha.

Sandy Forester has taken over as librarian of our lending library. The initiative led by Dave Mermelstein 2-3 years back to expand the library seems to continue year after year, and we received contributions of additional resources from other donors as well; the latest box of books has author Stephen Procter amongst others.

This past weekend (11/10/19), BSBC joined arms with 15 other local Faith Communities in a Memorial March honoring members of Bucks County whose lives were lost due to Gun Violence. Several members from our sangha participated in the march through Newtown Borough. The event was to promote Gun Violence Awareness as PA has one of the worse track records in the US as it relates to reasonable laws governing the purchase of guns. The group, led by Brad Sheeks, partnered with Heeding Gods Call to End Gun Violence for this effort.



Financially, we ended the year with a balance of approximately \$4,458 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, Michele Kleinbaum, for handling the expenses and records with both caution and a spirit of generosity.

Figure 1 - BSBC FY 2019 Financial Statement

BSBC FISCAL YEAR 2019 (Nov 1 to Oct 31)	
FINANCIAL REPORT OF INCOME / EXPENSES	
Balance from FY 2018 (corrected)	\$ 4,867
Income	\$ 9,943
Expenses	Rent \$5,400* Retreat rent 710 Teachers 2,450 Insurance 374 Donations 225 Purchases (incl media) 1,193 TOTAL \$ 10,352
Approximate Balance in Account (10/31/2019)	\$ 4,458

*note--rent at the Friends was overdue last November so this figure includes 8 additional weeks rent

The BSBC Board welcomed several new members this year: Norma Kaplis, Anna Schwartz, Erik Plumb, and Cicely Smith. We appreciate their willingness to be more involved and supportive of the BSBC and wish them and all members and attenders' fulfillment on the Dharma path.

We are grateful for the opportunity to have served in a leadership role for the Buddhist Sangha of Bucks County, 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.

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.

-- Joe Beck, Co-President
 -- Dave Mermelstein, Co-President