



Atisha Buddhist Centre

# ANNUAL REPORT



**2012**



## *Instructions for Life*

For a happier and much more fulfilling life, here are 20 not-so-easy-to-follow-but-doable instructions by

**His Holiness, The 14th Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso.**

1. Take into account that great love and great achievements involve great risk.
2. When you lose, don't lose the lesson.
3. Follow the three R's:- Respect for self, Respect for others and Responsibility for all your actions.
4. Remember that not getting what you want is sometimes a wonderful stroke of luck.
5. Learn the rules so you know how to break them properly.
6. Don't let a little dispute injure a great relationship.
7. When you realize you've made a mistake, take immediate steps to correct it.
8. Spend some time alone every day.
9. Open your arms to change, but don't let go of your values.
10. Remember that silence is sometimes the best answer.
11. Live a good, honourable life. Then when you get older and think back, you'll be able to enjoy it a second time.
12. A loving atmosphere in your home is the foundation for your life.
13. In disagreements with loved ones, deal only with the current situation. Don't bring up the past.
14. Share your knowledge. It is a way to achieve immortality.
15. Be gentle with the earth.
16. Once a year, go someplace you've never been before.
17. Remember that the best relationship is one in which your love for each other exceeds your need for each other.
18. Judge your success by what you had to give up in order to get it.
19. If you want others to be happy, practice compassion.
20. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.

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### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OCTOBER 2011 TO OCTOBER 2012

|                                |                  |
|--------------------------------|------------------|
| DIRECTOR                       | CHERRY RATTUE    |
| SPIRITUAL PROGRAM CO-ORDINATOR | LIAM CHAMBERS    |
| SECRETARY                      | MARILYN CHAMBERS |
| TREASURER                      | ADRIENNE NASH    |
|                                | MAXINE HAWKER    |
| MEMBERSHIP                     | KATHY RICE       |
| PUBLIC OFFICER                 | MARILYN CHAMBERS |
| ORDINARY COMMITTEE MEMBERS     | MILO KEI         |
|                                | BRIAN ASHEN      |
|                                | SALLY DUDGEON    |

### THANK YOU

Bendigo City Council, Jet Set Travel Bendigo,  
Bendigo Bank, Gary Hill, Builder.  
The Bead Shop Lyttleton Terrace, Star Cinema,  
Ron Dixon Excavations, Mitchell Street Florists,  
Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs,  
AASB Accounting and Auditing Solutions Bendigo  
Little Ripper Digger Service, Maiden Gully  
Fitzpatrick's Hardware, Eaglehawk Bakery,  
Bendigo Whole Foods Lyttleton Terrace,  
Bolton's Office National, Thubten Shedrup Ling Monastery  
The Great Stupa of Universal Compassion,  
Roger King's IGA Eaglehawk.



### MISSION STATEMENT

*Atisha Centre is a Tibetan Buddhist meditation centre, providing opportunities for study and practice of a spiritual path where people can develop their natural compassion and wisdom.*

# ATISHA CENTRE

## DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The Atisha Buddhist Centre is a beacon of peace for the local community and for others living further afield, offering a quiet place of refuge for study and reflection upon the Buddha's teachings. We have been extremely fortunate during this past year in the opportunities provided by Geshe Konchok Tsering, Ven. Thubten Gyatso, Ven. Lhundrup, Ven. Robina Courtin, Ven. Jampa and others to contemplate the precious Mahayana teachings and practices. With deep gratitude I acknowledge the skilful work of Sangha from Thubten Shedrup Ling Monastery, which greatly benefits students and visitors who make their way to Atisha Centre. Thank you, Venerable Sangha for your kindness and generosity, and may you continue to impart the precious teachings for a very long time.

### Executive Committee

As Director, I offer special thanks to the Executive Committee, who work unstintingly on behalf of the Atisha Centre. Our membership is small and consequently the Executive Committee functions as both the Board and the Committee of Management; which explains one of the reasons why our monthly meetings can sometimes run overtime! As members of the Board Liam, Adrienne, Maxine, Marilyn, Kathy, Brian and Milo have carried a mandate to check the direction and ensure the financial and legal health of the Centre. As members of the Management Committee, this same group have carried out their duties as Spiritual Programme Co-ordinator (SPC), treasurer, secretary, membership manager and general members. Their duties include the implementation of Centre policy, ensuring the day to day operations of the Centre, reviewing and overseeing project performance and budgets, and assessing how Centre staff and volunteers are meeting the needs of those using the Centre.

These stalwart volunteers far exceed their designated committee roles, and out of their kindness as Mahayana practitioners they have undertaken additional duties not strictly

within their remit, so that the Centre can continue to thrive. At busy times, alongside other volunteers they: clean, sweep, shop, serve at Atisha Gifts, make beds, cook, water and tend the gardens, launder, put up shelves, make curtains and bedspreads, transport members and teachers, participate in working bees ...

as well as attend the precious teachings. However this work, although meritorious and done with a good heart, does eat into the committee's time, leaving less time to participate in the local community, to build relationships with potential sponsors, to market the Centre and write grant applications. Insufficient time to attend to these important aspects was identified by those participating in the Strategic Planning day earlier this year.

### Volunteers

Our volunteers contribute immeasurably to Atisha Centre's compassionate activities and supportive environment, where all are welcome to learn about and directly benefit from our spiritual programme. Members are the heart of the Centre, and active members who volunteer regularly are the pulse that keeps the bodhicitta pumping! I offer my appreciation to the following dedicated volunteers: Hannelore, Maggie, Ronda, Celia, Rheese and Al who have worked regularly at Atisha Centre; Molly and Ruby for leading pujas, Gene and Shirley for co-ordinating Tuesday meditations in Bendigo, and Fiona Silver, Cindy Taylor and Jen Kyne, who travel far to work at Atisha Gifts. Steve Williams, our dedicated grounds and gardens person since December 2010, deserves a special mention as he manages the ravages of sun, wind, drought and flood on our gardens, buildings and roads; Hirani, editor of Atisha News, Cilla and Ruby who lead the Children's Dharma Club, and to the many others who help where and when they can. At the Strategic Planning Day we counted thirty four members or friends who over the last year have volunteered at Centre events such as Open Day, key teachings and retreats, or at





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Atisha Gifts. Thank you for taking to heart Lama Zopa Rinpoche's ethos of offering service to others as a compassionate path, leading to happiness and ultimately to enlightenment. This year, we once again received a small Federal grant (Families, Housing Children's Service & Indigenous Affairs) that helped towards volunteers' travel expenses and purchases of hand and gardening tools.

### **Administration**

Lama Zopa Rinpoche's retreat highlighted the need for an overhaul of our financial and administrative systems. Maxine took up the newly created position of Financial Manager at the end of 2011, and has received regular training in MYOB, which greatly assists the Centre's efficiency. Sue Daly stepped smilingly into the role of Office Manager in early 2011. Sue has created an efficient electronic booking system that, together with the new membership system and website, are the bones of a data base we hope to implement this coming year.

### **Impermanence**

All good things come to an end and when, early this year Liam Chambers gave notice of his resignation as Spiritual Programme Co-ordinator I felt samsara deliver yet another blow to all illusions of permanence ... Liam stepped valiantly into the SPC role in 2009 while still working long hours building the accommodation. I am indebted to Liam's adventurous and persevering spirit in taking up the challenge of co-ordinating the spiritual programme over the last three years. With good planning and teamwork we now have a substantial spiritual programme in place until February 2013. I am delighted that Liam will continue to play a key role at Atisha Centre; he has undertaken the pleasing task of completing several Holy Objects Projects, utilising some of his many skills to benefit Atisha Centre. I welcome Nathalie Meriaud from our sister Centre Chenrezig Institute as the incoming SPC, who has already shown great fortitude in battling her first Victorian winter. Thank you everyone for welcoming Nathalie into the Atisha family.

During the year we bade farewell and expressed our gratitude and appreciation to our resident teacher, Geshe Konchok Tsering, and to his translator, Noel Maddock. We also said goodbye to four key people, all of whom have relocated from Bendigo; Adrienne Nash, treasurer for over six years, Robyn Andrea, a long time active member of Atisha Centre, Ven. Lobsang, our Gompa keeper and Sally Dudgeon, committee member. Also thank you to Annette Robinson, gardener for many years. We welcomed Brian Ashen and Milo Kei as committee members, and Michael Chambers as our new 'techie' hero.

### **Strategic Planning.**

The strategic planning process recommenced in 2009 when members gathered to identify issues needing attention, and set goals for the Centre's future development. Their strategies and wish list for actions have during the past year been revisited and reassessed. Many issues that were seen as problems in 2009 have now been addressed, and others are still works in progress, moved into the "maintain and continue to improve" category, which is heartening. A member's planning day was held in May and the 20+ members present worked hard and joyously to review and reflect on progress and to make suggestions for the future. This input will be developed into a short-term action plan extending to the end of 2013, together with projected guidelines and goals for the next five years. It has been very helpful to have the strategic planning and input from members to guide the Executive committee in setting the direction for the Centre and in making important decisions. Our overarching goal is to develop the Centre according to Rinpoche's advice and wishes.

### **Achievements from June 2011-2012**

In addition to a flourishing Spiritual Programme, Atisha Centre's greatest achievements this year were:

1. Website Development. Special thanks to Marilyn who, over a period of months worked assiduously alongside Lila Tucker to develop our magnificent website, and produced individual website training manuals for Centre staff.

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2. Membership Restructure. Special thanks to Kathy who worked with Marilyn to review and reorganise the membership system.

3. Atisha Gifts. In July 2011 we employed Elaine Doling as Shop Manager for Atisha Gifts in Bendigo. As well as covering all expenses related to shop salaries and utilities, the shops now also contribute 50% to the Finance Manager's salary, fund the members' copies of Mandala Magazine, and sponsor the quarterly editions and all associated costs of the Atisha News.

4. Yoga. We have hired out the Centre for four yoga practice days and three yoga retreats since November 2011. We are pleased to extend our hospitality to the groups, for many of whom this is their introduction to Atisha Centre.

I leave you with the wisdom of Lama Zopa Rinpoche: "Think - every day I am a servant of all sentient beings. I am serving here to serve all sentient beings, and particularly the sentient beings in this community"

Cherry Rattue  
Director

### SPIRITUAL PROGRAM REPORT

*One day Ananda, who had been thinking deeply about things for a while, turned to the Buddha and exclaimed: "Lord, I've been thinking- spiritual friendship is at least half of the spiritual life!" The Buddha replied: "Say not so, Ananda, say not so. Spiritual friendship is the whole of the spiritual life!" Samyutta Nikaya, Verse 2.*



How fortunate we are to have so many precious teachers, I would like to respectfully acknowledge, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Geshe Konchok Tsering and the lineage holders of the past. We rejoice in their kindness and guidance for the Spiritual Program here at Atisha Buddhist Centre. My heartfelt wish is that Dharma will continue to flourish here, in Australia and

throughout the world for the benefit of sentient beings everywhere.

Mid year Geshe Konchok Tsering informed Cherry and myself that he intended to leave Atisha Centre to pursue his personal practice. Much has been expressed in other places in relation to Geshe-la leaving and I do not wish to elaborate here. I wish Geshe-la mountains of happiness and success in what he is doing and hope that we will always treasure the time he spent with us as a role model of patience, kindness, wisdom, and inspiration to us all.

We were very fortunate to have many wonderful learning opportunities with Geshe Konchok Tsering, such as his weekly teaching on the Lam Rim, 'Wheel of Sharp Weapons' Nagarjuna's 'Letter to a Friend'. Geshe-la also led us in His Holiness Dalai Lama's Birthday, International Sangha day, Community Days and Animal Blessings. In addition, Geshe-la guided us through many valuable week-end teachings. Geshe-la also gave time in the wider community to those in need of spiritual guidance during times of great illness and in the dying process.

A huge word of thanks goes to Noel Maddock in his role as interpreter for Geshe Konchok Tsering, we are indeed very grateful to have had Noel's experience interpreting clearly and precisely. Translating is a very challenging and intense job and we sincerely thank Noel for his ability and dedication.

As doors close, others open and Geshe Konchok Tsering's departure raised the issue of how to maintain access to teachings. The Atisha Centre 2009 strategic plan contained the wishes of members to have the opportunity to have teachings from other Lamas and Geshes and we saw the possibilities of inviting other visiting teachers. These began with Ven.Thubten Gyatso leading the Wednesday evening teachings and leading two wonderful 9 day retreats. To date we have also enjoyed Ven. Robina Courtin. In the not too distant future we are to host Geshe Thubten Sherab, Ven. Tenzin Chogyi and Dr Ross Moore. Further ahead in 2013 we can look forward to Ven. Robina's return and

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Glenn Svenssen. Invitations have been made to Renata Ogilvie, Khandro-La and Dagri Rinpoche who we hope may teach at Atisha Centre in the near future.

Atisha centre is privileged to have the support of the Sangha from Thubten Shedrup Ling Monastery. Their ongoing commitment to giving teachings, leading meditations and Pujas is of great benefit and sincerely appreciated in the implementation of the Spiritual Program. We can all rejoice in the presence of the 'Sangha Jewel'; their example, their concern and care for others has so much benefit to lay practitioners. I would like to sincerely thank Venerables Lhundrup, Thubten Gyatso, Tony, Jampa, Lobsang, and Namgyal.

In the last year many new volunteers have joined Atisha Centre helping in all aspects of the organisation. Thank you to all those new to the centre who given their kind support the Spiritual Program.

My heartfelt thanks go to the following: Ruby Karmay for leading the Peace and Wellness Practice on Mondays, leading meditations and especially this year for initiating a weekly Medicine Buddha practice at Atisha Centre in the Small Gompa; Ven .Lobsang for his role in Gompa management; Hannelore Best who took over and has our Gompas beautifully prepared for all occasions; Al Gabay for leading practice days, Sutra reading days and leading meditations; Dennis Kenny, Genny Blades, Nic Auger for leading meditations when the Sangha were unavailable; Molly Wiseman for leading Tara Pujas and meditations; Cilla Brady, Ruby Karmay, Hirani Chambers, Gita Ratna and Di McLure: for leading the Children's Dharma club; there's a saying that goes "*the way to a man's heart is through his stomach*". Perhaps here at Atisha Centre we might say "the way to someone's heart is through generosity," thank you to Ronda Rodwell and Maggie Wallace for their wonderful support preparing the lunch and caring for the Sangha on Community Days.

I would like to say a big thank you and express my gratitude to Cherry and Hannelore for their support in the Spiritual Program Support team. Hannelore works tirelessly in support of the program, coordinating Discovering Buddhism, updating and maintaining the SPC files, assisting with planning and running many events and in re-establishing the library. Her sincerity and cheery presence adds to the welcoming tone of the centre. Cherry has been an invaluable support to me and to the Spiritual Program, skilfully assisting and ensuring that the overall program of the centre is cohesive and continuous.

I have been in the role of Spiritual Program Coordinator since 2009, at first in a limited capacity due to other urgent commitments at the centre, until the last year or so when I have been able to fully concentrate on the role. In developing a greater understanding of the role, it has been my joy to have contributed to the new direction and strength of the current program and to lay a foundation for future programs.

I welcome Nathalie to the role of SPC, may her skills and abilities further develop and improve the Spiritual Program and ultimately the Atisha Centre.

Thank you to Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Atisha Centre Committee and members for the opportunity to serve as SPC, it has been significant in my personal spiritual growth.

### SUMMARY OF SPIRITUAL PROGRAM

#### WEEKLY PROGRAM

##### Sunday

- Buddhist Meditation

##### Monday

- Teaching with Geshe Konchok Tsering - Nagarjuna's 'Letter to a Friend'
- Peace and Wellness Practice at Atisha Gifts

##### Tuesday

- Buddhist Meditation at Atisha Gifts

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- Karuna Relaxation meditation at Atisha Gifts

### Wednesday

Teaching with Geshe Konchok Tsering

- Liberation in the Palm of your Hand.

### Tuesday and Wednesday 2012

Atisha Centre Teachings with

Ven.Thubten Gyatso

- Karma and Rebirth
- The 6 Main Minds and the 51 Mental Functions
- The Bodhisattva's Path
- Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life

### **MONTHLY PROGRAM**

- Community day and Dharma Club for Children 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in month
- Geshe Konchok Tsering teaching at Dromtonpa study group Daylesford.

### Pujas and Precepts

Medicine Buddha Puja

From the beginning of May 2012, Medicine Buddha puja has been held at 6.15 pm in the Small Gumpa prior to teaching

- Tara Pujas were held Monthly from May 2012
- Guru Puja
- Precepts
- Special Guru Pujas
- Special Tara Puja

### Teachings and Courses

- Week-end teaching with Geshe Konchok Tsering - The Six Perfections. June 2011
- Introduction to Buddhist Teaching and Meditation Public Talks with Ven. Thubten Gyatso.
- Discovering Buddhism. 'Refuge in the Three Jewels', 'Presenting the Path',
- Buddhism in a Nutshell Ven. Lhundrup. June 2012.
- Nyung Ne. June 2011, June 2012.
- Individual practice days. Two
- Vajrasattva practice days. August, December 2011, January, February and May 2012

- Lama Tsong Khapa Day Guru Puja. November 2011
- Refuge Ceremony with Geshe Konchok Tsering. May 2011

### Retreats

- Strictly Meditating with Ven.Thubten Gyatso . November.2011
- Lam Rim with Ven.Thubten Gyatso. April.2012
- Chenrezig Retreat and Light Offering with Venerable Tony. December 2011
- Karma and Emptiness with Ven. Robina Courtin. March 2012

### Other Events

- His Holiness the Dalai Lama's birthday celebration.
- International Sangha Day.
- Animal Blessing Day. July 2011
- Sutra recitation.
- Consecration of the Green Tara statue.

Liam Chambers.

Spiritual Program Coordinator.

### **ATISHA CENTRE GIFT SHOP**

The Atisha Centre Gift Shop forms part of Atisha Buddhist Centre's retail venture, the main shop being in Lyttleton Terrace, Bendigo city. Staffed by volunteers, the shop provides an income stream and disseminates knowledge about Buddhism and about the Centre. Over the last 12 months, there have been many improvements in the stock on offer, and the consolidation of merchandise focusing especially on goods to assist our Dharma practice. The new website has also been a boon. Practice items such as books, ritual implements and cushions can be found alongside general gift items, incense, jewellery and shawls. We endeavour to keep product lines that help communities, such as the fine Murano glass jewellery and the Dolls4Tibet, both made by Tibetan refugees,





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and among our sources are the FPMT store and Kopan monastery. We have a dedicated band of shop volunteers, some of whom travel long distances, who through the generosity of members and friends, have been instrumental in turning a modest but consistent profit that enables our beloved Atisha Buddhist Centre to flourish and to better serve our community. The shop is open currently on Sundays (between 11:00 and 2:00) and on practice days, and we are looking for more volunteers, so that we can stay open on Saturdays to cater for the increasing stream of visitors. If you are interested in serving the Centre, the Guru and all sentient beings in this way, please come and have a chat. From myself and the other volunteers, I give heartfelt thanks for your continuing support.

Al Gabay  
Manager, Atisha Centre Gift Shop

### ATISHA GIFTS BENDIGO

I have been Manager of Atisha Gifts for a year now, and it has been a rewarding experience.

#### Improved Sales

We have managed to reap the benefit of increased tourism to Bendigo due to the 'Grace Kelly: Style Icon' block buster exhibition. We now have quite a number of regular customers, especially as we have extended our hours to 5.30 during the week, picking up a number of people shopping after work. I have increased Saturday hours to 2 pm over the last year, which has seen Saturday often become our most successful day.



#### Staff

We have had a number of changes this year. Julie is still with us, and I would like to Christie, and 'Young' Liam who have moved on. Fiona has done a wonderful job with layout over the last couple of months as our Wednesday volunteer. We welcome three new volunteers, Norma, David and Yeshi. I

have reduced my hours to eight a week and now focus on stock control, buying, banking and liaising with Darren and the volunteers. Darren has been employed for 12 hours a week to cover Fridays and Saturdays.

#### Money, Stock, and Suppliers

The main problem for the shop is undercapitalisation, meaning that we often do not have enough money to restock with fast turn over items in sufficient quantities as required. Some suppliers have minimum orders of up to \$400-500 meaning that we sometimes run out of popular stock before we can reorder. Opportunities to stock new items, which could be very successful on a trial basis, are limited by the need to use what money is available to restock when we can with regular sellers. I reduced the price on some slow moving items, this was successful in clearing out much 'dead' stock. I have extended our range of incense including quality Japanese Incense which has been very popular with many regular return customers. I have been purchasing more stock from House of Tibet and Tibet House this year. We now have some stock that is exclusive to us in Bendigo, such as wind chimes and metal and glass hanging wall ornaments. I always make sure that new stock is good quality and fair trade, locally made, or from ethical suppliers who guarantee that employees and the environment are cared for.

#### Dharma Goods

We have sold two hand painted Thangkas this year, and they certainly make the shop look beautiful. Books have been selling well, and we have been getting a great deal from Windhorse Books, who give us a good discount and free freight because we are a fellow Buddhist organisation. I have also stocked a range of meditation CDs and DVDs, which sold very well. Deity statues from Nepal are selling slowly.

#### Promoting The Centre

Our window dedicated to promoting meditation and events at the centre is creating interest and bringing people into the shop. We have lots of enquiries about meditation classes and courses, and consequently we

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have the opportunity to promote Atisha Centre and give out copies of the newsletter. Many of these enquirers look around the shop and at our range of books and make purchases. Promoting the Atisha Centre, bringing people into contact with the Buddha Dharma, and helping to support it financially is our reason for being here, and we find that we are sometimes called upon to offer a sympathetic ear and a tissue to customers who come into the shop at difficult times looking for a book or something to help them get by - because they feel drawn to our Buddhist shop.

### The Future

I hope that before too long we will have enough volunteers to open at least one more day a week. Our excellent location near the car park and near complementary businesses such as cafes, the Bead Shop, Bendigo Wholefoods, and several other boutique gift shops nearby is a bonus. Overall, the year has gone very well and I hope the shop can grow into the future, for the benefit of the Atisha Centre, our customers, promotion of the Buddha Dharma, and the benefit of all sentient beings.

Elaine Doling  
Atisha Gifts Manager

### ATISHA CENTRE LIBRARY

Since relocating to the small gumpa after the Lama Zopa Rinpoche retreat the library has seen increased use. There is more space to peruse the shelves and readers have a cosy space to sit and read. Shortly the collection of audio-visual material and books will increase and it is hoped that the catalogue will be placed on the webpage before the end of 2012 making it easier for members to see what is available. Members are able to borrow for up to one month and visitors are welcome to browse while at the Centre. Members are reminded that prompt return of items will give everyone the chance to benefit from the library. As we do not have a librarian onsite at all times we rely on members to assist in this matter. If you have any enquiries please see Hannelore.

### DISCOVERING BUDDHISM and BUDDHISM IN A NUTSHELL

In 2011 we were fortunate to have Ven. Thubten Gyatso lead the module on *Refuge* in September. Students found the module very beneficial and were able to explore refuge in greater depth. Many thanks go to Ven. Thubten Gyatso for making the time to teach the module on refuge and sharing his insights with the group. Toward the end of 2011 Ven Lhundrup led the module on *How to Meditate*. This is always popular with Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike and was well attended. This year we have seen some significant changes. We have been using the Randall Room at St Andrews Church hall in Myers St for classes, a comfortable and conducive environment for teachers and students alike. The year began with *Buddhism in a Nutshell*, with a large group of students. This is the first time that Atisha Centre has offered this subject, which provides an overview for students with no prior experience of Buddhism. This was followed by the module *Presenting the Path* also led by Ven Lhundrup. Some of the students who had attended *Buddhism in a Nutshell* joined this class. Many thanks go to Ven Lhundrup for his time, patience and good humour in sharing his knowledge and experience with students. May this year saw me handing the baton of Discovering Buddhism onto Maxine. During the years of co-ordinating *Discovering Buddhism* I was able to gain a valuable grounding in the teachings and am grateful to all of the teachers who have taught in the program over the years.

Hannelore Best.

### CHILDREN'S DHARMA CLUB

This year I have enjoyed facilitating the monthly Children's Dharma Club, with help from Ruby, who facilitated when I was unavailable. Readings of stories from the Buddha's life and Jataka tales, from various sources including the Atisha library and my



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own books, gave us material for discussion. My focus is on how the Buddhist principles and simple practices can be applied to everyday life, and also encouraging meditation at home.

In each session we do a guided meditation and sing a song or two in English. There are a lot of English Buddhist songs that are easy, enjoyable, with messages to impart. We also do an art project each time, making cards, origami, colouring in of Buddhist images or symbols, puzzles, etc.

Parents and caregivers have the choice to stay or go to the main Gompa if their children are old enough (at least 6 years old) and feel comfortable without them. The adults who stay enjoy the activities and usually participate, sometimes reading the story for instance, and helping their child with the art project. If they like they can also just relax and enjoy reading from the library, which sometimes is the case.

The attendance has been very low, maximum attendance was four children, the minimum was one. The usual attendance was two-three children. It seems that there could be more advertising of the Children's Dharma Club to the wider community to increase attendance. It could be a way to bring new adult participants to the centre. It would also be beneficial to facilitate the Karen families' return to Community Days and the children to Dharma Club. I have brought both these ideas to the attention of the committee.

The small Gompa has a concrete floor, which is cold, and makes it very hard to be without shoes in the winter. I have worn shoes and so have some of the children. This may dismay some of Atisha Centre members, but to make it a shoeless environment I would suggest thicker insulated complete carpet coverage.

Cilla Brady

## GROUND AND GARDENS

### Garden Maintenance

Prior to Lama Zopa's retreat in April 2001, over 300 plants were planted and my work since then has been to keep as many of those baby plants alive as possible by hand watering during the long, hot and dry summer. With the help of a few dedicated volunteers and a mild summer there was only about 10% loss of plants. Noel and Annette did an amazing job of creating the Atisha Centre gardens. Noel built a lot of garden walls and at this time I see my work as mainly consolidating what has been built, through pruning and making small modifications to improve drainage, as well as watering and mulching. Currently I am working to reinstall the dripper system so that these garden plants can be more efficiently watered using timers and accurately directed water.



### Environmental Pruning

I have been cleaning up the trees within the centre grounds to reduce fire hazard and improve the health of the forest. I do this by firstly removing any dead trees and branches and continue with environmental pruning. This is achieved by removing any weak and stunted trees so that the remaining stronger trees can obtain more nutrients and grow. The trees within the centre are all regrowth and there are over 300 trunks per hectare, whereas healthy old growth forest of this Box / Ironbark type usually contains only about 60 – 70 trees / trunks per hectare. At this stage I only plan to remove the weaker trees and stems so at least 250 or more per hectare will remain. The healthiest trees are the ones surrounded by the gardens that have benefitted from years of watering, fertilising and mulching. The forests to the north, east and west of the centre have the smaller and weaker growth. The trees to the south of the centre are bigger and stronger as they benefit from the runoff from the centre which takes water, nutrients and silt to that lower level giving them deeper topsoil with more nutrients and water.

### Drainage

There are still many problems with drainage. The flooding of the little gompa is targeted for

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more drainage works. I have obtained stormwater pipe from discarded drilling programs, and plan to install one piece of this across the Monastery path to remove more water from that western hill, which is the main water that floods the little gompa. The hillside on the north side of the centre concentrates water which floods through the centre paths during large rain events, removing gravel from the paths and blocking the drains along the driveway. I plan to slow down this water and attempt to direct it into the soil / subsoil within the forest areas where it emanates from. This will require the digging of many channels and small holding ponds so that more water is provided to the trees to aide their regrowth. This work will help to reduce the loss of nutrients and mulch, due to the volume of water that builds up and removes topsoil and mulch. I plan to direct any excess water that flows along the path from the kitchen to the main Gompa, into the fishpond in the Lama Yeshe gardens.

The drains either side of the driveway road within the centre grounds require improvement. They need to be widened and have larger pipes inserted where there are existing pipes. Replacing the pipes will be a more difficult job and for now it is only possible to widen the drains, deepen them in places and install pits before each pipe to remove sediment and slow down the water flows.

Within the forest on the east side of the centre, I have been using the trunks of the small trees as water retarding dams so as to slow down the water flowing through this part of the forest. Here there are larger flows due to runoff from the Great Stupa path and I am working to reduce the erosive power of this water. This has resulted in the bare ground under the trees near the entrance and main Atisha Centre car park. Reducing these flows will result in a build up of mulch and hence nutrients which will encourage the trees to become stronger and healthier.

There is still a lot of grounds work to do and anyone who wishes to help is most welcome. Come and use your body and develop strength and health which will benefit your mind so that you can study dharma well.

Steve Williams  
Grounds and Gardens

### MEMBERSHIP REPORT

The launch of our new website earlier this year heralded in a new era for Atisha Centre's membership management.

- Significantly, yearly or half yearly membership can now be paid for online.
- An option of monthly payments is available with subscribers direct depositing to Atisha Centre through their own banking institutions.
- Also a restructured membership has evolved, addressing issues raised at the strategic planning day in 2011. Of significant concern were the lack of concession options and the complicated categories and their inequitable benefits.

Now there are only two categories; a single membership and a family membership both of which offer concession options for students and those on pensions. All members receive exactly the same benefits:

- A subscription to our quarterly newsletter
- 10% discount on most courses
- 10% discount at Atisha Gifts on most items
- Atisha Centre library membership
- 2 nights basic accommodation per year free
- A quarterly copy of FPMT Mandala magazine

Under the previous structure, only those who paid the higher rate of subscriptions were entitled to copies of Mandala. The magazine, which retails at \$8.00 per copy and which enables members to keep up to date with what is happening in the FPMT organisation, is sent each quarter directly from FPMT America to our members.

Similarly those who had paid higher rates received bigger discounts on courses. There is now a more equitable flat rate of 10% for all members.



## ATISHA CENTRE

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While family memberships costs rose so too did the benefits. Previously only the family member in whose name the subscription was taken out was eligible for course discounts and free accommodation. Now both adult members are entitled to the same discounts and 2 nights free accommodation.

In June this year our membership stood at 74 significantly down from our all time best of 98. We attribute this to several factors. Firstly, it has taken some time for membership to take up the option of paying for subscriptions on line.

Secondly, there were considerable delays by some members in setting up direct debits through their own banking institutions.

However, there are signs that things are on the mend. (In August 2012 the membership stood at 84.)

We extend a sincere *"thank you"* to all our members for your ongoing support, we rejoice in the merit created through your kindness and generosity and we wish you and your families much peace and Dharma happiness.

Kathy Rice  
Membership Manager.

### WEBSITE AND NETWORK

The new website build began in August 2011 and was completed for publication in February 2012. We are indebted to web designer Lila Tucker for many hours of hard

work and creativity in designing a website that meets our needs for the future. It includes an interactive calendar which is updated daily, many new information pages, photo gallery, newsletter download, audio teachings download, and many other features that help people stay in touch with our centre. People are now able to make secure payments on line including becoming a new member and renewing membership online, register and pay for programs and make donations safely and securely from their own computer. General inquiries, inquiries for accommodation and volunteering can also be made online as well as feedback on programs and courses. A

further feature of the website is the transfer of the E-News feature and a completely new visual image for all Atisha Centre branding with cool, crisp, gentle gum leaves reflecting our tranquil bush setting. Secretary, Marilyn Chambers, oversees the daily management of website information and is continuously training other centre staff to use and manage aspects of the website.

Hand in hand with the new website was a complete rebuild of the computer network and so we are now more reliably connected with great storage and back up and the ability to share files and access our resources off-site through the cloud. Our wonderful computer consultant/technician, Micheal Chambers, is based in Melbourne and manages our resources remotely as well as with onsite visits as needed.

Marilyn Chambers  
Secretary

### FINANCIAL REPORT

There have been many changes in the disbursement and management of our finances this year. With sadness we said goodbye in December to Adrienne Nash, our Treasurer extraordinaire of seven years, who did a fabulous job. Adrienne, thank you for all your hard work and tireless effort.



### Employment, salaries and stipends:

After Geshe Konchok Tsering's departure in October Atisha Centre continued to provide him with a stipend until March, and a return airfare to India. Noel Maddock, the interpreter officially left the Centre at the end of January. Sue Daly became the part time Office Manager in February. I became the Finance Manager in January, and work part time in this newly created paid position. We have employed a book-keeper for four to eight hours a month, at a cost of \$1,573.00 Wendy's guidance and knowledge have been invaluable to the implementation of better

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financial accounting and support to the Financial Manager.

### **Equipment and infrastructure:**

We released our new website in February. The heavily discounted cost was \$3,600.00 for software and website design fees. The office computer network was replaced and upgraded for just over \$2500.00. A \$821.00 laptop and software were purchased for the Finance Manager.

### **Accounting, loans and grants:**

In this financial year we repaid \$6,000.00 in loans to three members. In consultation with Bendigo Bank we have reduced the number of bank accounts, and thus our fees. In addition, the new bank accounts are interest bearing. We received a \$3,500.00 Volunteer Grant from Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs for fuel and land care equipment.

### **Monthly recurrent payments:**

Gompa Mortgage \$917.00. We are on track to complete payments in 2014.

\$2,500 of a no interest loan has been repaid to two members, \$17,500 remains unpaid.

Five year loan to the Great Stupa. \$350 plus variable interest of 5.6%

At the end of the financial year the loan stood at \$13,000.00

Comprehensive Insurance \$983.18 - this covers Atisha Gifts in Bendigo.

FPMTA Levy and Volunteer insurance - \$350.00

### **Offerings:**

Atisha Centre makes regular offerings on behalf of members to: TSL Monastery of \$50.00 every month; Sangha from TSL for teachings, meditations, courses and retreats; His Holiness Dalai Lama's Office ; Long Life Pujas for His Holiness Dali Lama and Lama Zopa Rinpoche; and at other times throughout the year when requested by FPMT; International Mayahana Institute; Light Offerings; Requests to teachers to teach.

### **Atisha Gifts:**

In July 2011 Elaine took over as Shop Manager. In June the Shop Manager reduced

her hours from 20 to 8 hours per week, and a shop assistant was employed to cover the busy Fridays and Saturdays. Financially the shops are doing more than holding their own. Since early this year Atisha Gifts now contributes to half of the Finance Manager's wages as approximately 50% of the workload is generated by the shops. Earlier this year Atisha Gifts Bendigo, upgraded the computer and register, and purchased a small photocopier.

### **In summary:**

As our audited reports show we continue to struggle to cover overheads and maintain the infrastructure necessary for a flourishing Centre. We rely on donations, membership, a thin margin from courses and a small income from Atisha Gifts. We are pleased that members have taken advantage of the concession membership. However, the concession rate, together with the time it has taken for members to become familiar with the changes to membership subscription and payment, appears to have reduced our income, albeit temporarily, during December 2011 – June 2012. In 2011 we estimated that it cost \$350-\$380 a day to cover all operating costs for 2010 – 2011. With the higher cost of utilities this is likely to have increased this financial year. In the next few months we will be working to provide detailed budgets for 2012-2013 for the various operating areas of the Centre. This information will be made available on an ongoing basis.



I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the Centre either by way of donation or volunteering. We wouldn't be able to operate without your enormous support. Thank you all for supporting me, giving me guidance and allowing me the time to master my new role.

Maxine Hawker  
Treasurer.



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**MEMBER OF THE FOUNDATION FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE MAHAYANA TRADITION**

Atisha Centre is located just 15 minutes from the heart of Bendigo. Follow the Loddon Valley Highway through Eaglehawk and turn left at the Allies Hotel (Allies Rd) turn right into Sandhurst Town Road.

