



New Zealand Buddhist Council

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Message from the Chair

April and May are months in which there are "Buddha's birthday" celebrations for the traditions of many of our members. These events are of course times when we can reflect deeply on the significance of the Buddha's awakening. They are also times when we can reach out to the wider public and let them have a taste of Buddhist practices and cultures.

This bulletin is mostly unillustrated because there haven't been many face to face encounters to report on - largely thanks to social distancing. We do meet on Zoom of course. So we can share a picture of that - at a light-hearted moment -



With changing alert levels, our voluntary work as Executive for NZBC has had a focus on what could be done electronically.

I want to share with you a quick look at some of what our outgoing correspondence has been targeting so far in 2021. It may lead you to contact us and ask questions. We welcome that. The topics involved are reflected in items below.

- Written to you as members concerning the forthcoming Buddhist Chaplain training we undertake with Amitabha Hospice.
- Written to the Hon Kris Faafoi as Minister of Immigration, requesting information on when Immigration New Zealand expects next policy reviews to occur around religious visas. This is a reminder that it has been almost a decade since significant review in that area.
- Written to Minister Little and Minister Radhakrishnan pointing out the value of our faith communities to social cohesion and seeking consistency in engagement.
- Co-written with Religious Diversity Centre Religious Leaders Forum to the above Ministers and the Prime Minister on meaningful steps to social cohesion that acknowledge the types of community that have been subjected to terror attack in this country, and ways to combat extremism.
- We co-signed one letter and co-wrote another to Nikko Odiseos the President of Shambhala Publications out of concerns brought to us by Pali scholars and others concerning their publication of a work that misrepresented the Therīgāthā.
- We have been corresponding with other Buddhist organisations with Climate action priorities, here and across the Tasman.
- Invitations went out to all Auckland members of NZ Buddhist Council for a regional meeting this Saturday 27 March and I look forward to meet many of you then.

Border exemptions - have you had any experience on this?

We are putting out an appeal for you to get in touch if you have applied for a border exemption recently or have any experience around that.

Member experience reported to us recently has been that monks are certainly not high on the list. Have you had any other experience? Officials claimed that a monk's training does not represent a unique or specialist skill not readily obtainable in New Zealand.

Their statement seems to have been made without understanding how many Buddhist communities operate. Mind you, the bar is also set high with other requirements - 'undertaking a time-critical role' and bringing 'significant wider benefit to the national or regional economy'.

So whether you've been successful or unsuccessful in such applications please let us know.

More broadly we realise how much some Dharma centres are suffering under present immigration policies, and it's hard. We know how strong the wish is for more compassion and real understanding from Immigration New Zealand.

We remain committed to continue lobbying, just as we have before. With your support we can do that.

Personally I had some great success in the past with lobbying - in the industry I was working within - a group I started got major changes to telecommunications policies. So I know that strategic, highly informed efforts are the way. Also I learned work within the long cycle of official policy reviews and seek what can be achieved within the political constraints of the time.

Inter-Buddhism celebrations - 26 May is 2564 Vesak and 2021 Saga Dawa Duchen!

Please let us know what Buddha's Birthday plans your centre has for this year.

These events do of course hold a lot of significance for us all, as times when as communities we get together to recall and celebrate the significance of the Buddha's attainments and the opportunity that he brought us all to practice his Dharma.

We send our salutations to member temples Namkook and MyoSimSa as we know their Buddha's Birthday celebrations are coming up at the start of April. Namu Buddhaya!

In Dunedin the Buddhist groups are planning a joint event for the weekend following Vesak - 29 May. We will send you more detail of that as it comes to hand.

Climate emergency - Climate Change Commission - Submissions open until 28 March

A Bellweather Indicator for Planetary Environmental Stability,
Global Economic Security & Inter-Generational Sustainability

Mar. 9, 2021	416.43 ppm
Mar. 9, 2020	413.95 ppm
1 Year Change	2.48 ppm (0.60%)

Last CO₂ Earth update: 3:35:05 AM on Mar. 10, 2021, Hawaii local time (UTC -10)

It's highly concerning. We are in real trouble. Conscientious citizens with compassion for humanity will want to add their voice to this. Please send a submission to the Climate Change Commission.

We have **until 28 March** to each submit our comments on the Climate Change Commission's draft advice to Government on actions that must be taken to reach net-zero.

The Commission has done a good job in guiding people. You will find a box with "Give us your views" on this page - <https://haveyoursay.climatecommission.govt.nz/comms-and-engagement/future-climate-action-for-aotearoa/>

To make a submission online click on that and it leads you through a series of questions to guide you about the areas they want to hear from you on.

There is a lot of support for making submissions and there are many concerns you might wish to explore - depending on what activities within the functioning of our society and economy you are focused on.

Buddhist teachers writing recently about the climate emergency from a Buddhist practice perspective

Many Buddhist teachers are teaching in ways that help people be effective in response to the climate emergency. As the climate change we face is human made, so then the core problem is the causes we create as humans. Dharma provides the deepest and most sustainable cooling

measures by addressing the causes. We need equanimity from our practice in order not to fall into such things as anger or resignation, and we need the insight and perseverance our faith brings us to keep going in wise directions. We have the tools to respond to the outer emergency as not separate from the challenges of our practice. In this situation our requirements for compassion and ethical conduct must extend to preventing harm to the shared environment in all practical ways we can manage - For the sake of all living beings and beings yet to be born.

Published in October 2020 is a book authored by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Franz Alt entitled "Our Only Home - a Climate Appeal to the World". This is a compelling read, an eloquent appeal to humanity to wake up. In it His Holiness says "Any human activity should be carried out with a sense of responsibility, commitment and discipline. But if our activities are carried out with short-sightedness and for short-term gains like money or power, then they all become negative and destructive activities. Protecting our environment is not a luxury we can choose to enjoy but a matter of survival.

"Even a small rise in our body's temperature can cause us discomfort, while an increase of five to six degrees can be life-threatening. Annually, we have been witnessing global warming due to climate change. Recently, both America and Europe have experienced extremely hot summers and cold winters. The questions of the environment and climate change are global issues, not just concerns for Europe, Asia, Africa or the Americas. What happens on this blue planet affects us all."

"It is not sufficient to just express views and hold conferences. We must set a timetable for change."

In 2019 the respected scholar and teacher Bhikkhu Anālayo published "Mindfully Facing Climate Change". It is a profound analysis of how the teachings of early Buddhism provide lessons that are intensely relevant to how we are best to respond to the crisis of this time. Ajahn Amaro writes in endorsement "Through citing numerous pragmatic teachings and meditation techniques, the book shows us how we can change our habits and live in ways conducive to the well-being of the planet, of our human community and of us as individuals. Climate change is indeed a challenging diagnosis but it can cause us to wake up, let go and unselfishly help the world - to live more fully and skillfully - which is a blessing indeed for all concerned". If you wish to, you can read Bhikkhu Anālayo's work in PDF form from the website of the institution where he is a resident scholar. <https://www.buddhistinquiry.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/MFCC-book-final-pdf2.pdf>

Shambhala Publications book presenting the Therīgāthā is being revised after strong critique.

Last year Venerable Sudhamma from North Carolina and several Pali scholars noted very serious integrity problems with the first edition of a book released by North American Buddhist publisher Shambhala Publications - "the first *free* women - Poems of the Early Buddhist Nuns". Despite claiming to present the enlightenment poems of the original Arahanti as found in the Therīgāthā in the Pali Canon, Matty Weingast the translator/author had put his own imaginings into their poetry and across their motivations while attributing that work to the voices of these Therī. Misrepresentation of this sutta can be seen as a harm to Dhamma transmission in the world and certainly affects authentic relaying of this earliest collection ever of women's literature.

As the book was being distributed throughout the English-speaking world, and some English-speaking Dhamma teachers had accepted and endorsed it, the issue became one of far-reaching concern with embarrassing implications. Now that endorsers have been shown vivid comparisons to reliable translations, some have withdrawn the praise they initially gave. Public admission of a mistake such as this takes a type of moral courage which is admirable to see.

Buddhist Council responded to a request to join the call to Shambhala Publications for the ethical issues to be addressed. A summary of the events and clear analysis of the issues is to be found on the website put together for that purpose - <https://firstfreewomen.org>

Our executive committee discussed the issue and agreed to add our voice to the requests for change being sent to the publisher by concerned Buddhists around the world. The correspondence with Shambhala Publications President led to the first edition being stopped and evidently the second edition will be labelled as "a re-imagining" of the poems. While not entirely satisfactory, this is a good step back from many undeclared changes to the Therī's enlightenment poems. We have not yet seen a second edition and we will in time review what claims end up being made within that.

If these matters interest you, here are links to the two letters we co-signed
<https://fakebuddhaquotes.com/an-open-letter-to-nikko-odiseos-president-of-shambhala-publications/>

<https://firstfreewomen.org/public-statement/followup-open-letter-to-nikko-odiseos-president-of-shambhala-publication-15-feb-2021/>

We would also recommend reading <https://lithub.com/how-a-poetry-collection-masquerading-as-buddhist-scripture-nearly-duped-the-literary-world/>

There are upsides to all this

- Authentic translations of Therīgāthā are becoming better known as a result of the wide coverage that this literary scandal has attracted.
- In assisting with the letters to Shambhala Publications we experienced effective global co-writing in a good way. There were many careful and compassionate steps taken by those involved in raising the challenge.
- Sutta such as the wonderful teaching poems of the first Therī have been carefully preserved for us for many centuries. While there are many fake Buddhist quotes circulating in social media, Buddhist publishers and book endorsers will now have an incentive to show more care with precious sutta.