

Buddhism in Brisbane

THEN AND NOW

The introduction of Buddhist practice into Brisbane is a very recent event in the 2,500 year history of Buddhism, with the first record of a Buddhist presence here dating from the 1880s.

Among Brisbane's Chinese population was a small group who identified themselves as Buddhists. They gathered at Brisbane's first temple, the Temple of the Holy Triad, which was built at Breakfast Creek in the mid 1880s and remains on its original site. Religious practice at this temple was not exclusively Buddhist, but a blend of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. By the 1900s, the number of Chinese people in Brisbane and the practice of Buddhism had declined.

In 1953 the first attempt was made to organise Anglo-Australian Buddhist activity in Brisbane, through the foundation of the Buddhist Society of Queensland. The high point of the Buddhist Society's brief period of activity was the April 1955 visit to Brisbane of the first internationally known Buddhist teacher, the Venerable Narada Maha Thera. Despite the success of the visit, the society's numbers dwindled and it ceased to function after 1956.

The most important influence on the growth of Buddhism in Brisbane was the arrival, from the late 1970s, of immigrants from Buddhist countries; in particular Vietnam, Malaysia, Cambodia and Thailand. In recent years, people's contact with Buddhism has increased through visits of prominent Buddhist teachers, most notably His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the growth in spiritual and tourist travel to Asia and the influential profile created by Hollywood celebrities like Richard Gere.

The growing appeal of Buddhist philosophy and meditation in a changing world has seen the number of Buddhist organisations in Brisbane increase by 10 times - from 4 in 1982, to 40 in 2004. Attendance at the various Buddhist festivals in Brisbane also continues to rise. In 1997, its first year, the Buddha Birthday Festival at South Bank attracted 5,000 people and last year up to 180,000 attended. This celebration of Buddha is Brisbane's best-attended festival and showcases the growing importance of Buddhism in our wider community.



1. Temple of the Holy Triad, Breakfast Creek 1886. Collection of John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.



2. Temple 2005. Museum of Brisbane.



3. 2004 Buddha's Birthday Festival at Southbank. Photograph courtesy of The Courier Mail.



4. His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Photograph courtesy of Langri Tangpa Centre.

Brisbane Buddhas

In Brisbane today it is possible to encounter a statue of Buddha in the most unexpected of places. While it is impossible to determine when the first Buddha statue would have come to Brisbane – the overwhelming interest and response to this exhibition reveals that today Buddha is part of many people's daily lives.

This exhibition has come from the community and is for the community – a collaborative process of understanding what Buddha means to people. We ask you to consider what meanings we attribute to Buddha and how the presence of Buddha reflects the way the city is changing.

To practising Buddhists – the statues are important sacred objects, symbols of Enlightenment. Many meditate in front of their Buddha and see the statue as the embodiment of Buddha's teachings and as markers to their personal journey to Enlightenment.

To others the bond with their Buddha has been formed through an event, a person or a place as:

Gifts – for significant events like weddings and christenings

Family heirlooms – passed down from generation to generation - the original story may be lost but its connection to family members remains vivid

Souvenirs – as more Australians travel to Asia for leisure and work, the Buddha statue is becoming a memento of these vivid experiences

Garden ornament – gardeners often use Buddha statues to add serenity

Good luck – many believe the statue brings them good luck and good fortune.

The Buddha statues in this exhibition are from across South East Queensland where they are displayed in many different ways in living rooms, bedrooms, gardens, restaurants, temples, schools and offices. The statues originate in many different countries, cities, towns and regions.

The abundance of Buddha statues amongst the City's residents and the range of meanings attributed to them, demonstrate that Brisbane is a changing, complex, and sophisticated city.

This exhibition has been developed in partnership with the community and the Centre for Buddhist Studies, University of Queensland.

IMAGES BY RUSSELL SHAKESPEARE 2005



1. Joy Jones, Wynnum Central

2. Suzie Lim, The Gap

3. Sharna Galvin, Moorooka

4. Ryan Family, Mount Gravatt East

Four Noble Truths

The Four Noble Truths, the foundation of Buddhist doctrine, are the following four short propositions:

- All existence is suffering, that is, 'flawed' or 'unsatisfactory'
- The suffering arises because of craving for pleasurable sensations and experiences
- When there is no craving there is no suffering (that is Nirvana)
- There is a Path, consisting of eight factors, which leads to the end of suffering, Nirvana.

The Eightfold Path

- right view
- right intention
- right speech
- right action
- right livelihood
- right energy/effort
- right attention/mindfulness
- right concentration

