

N.11 • Autumn 2023

EUROPEAN BUDDHIST

magazine

Buddhism and education



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INTRODUCING OUR WRITERS



Sara Manzi is a language teacher, peace educator, and Vipassana practitioner. She studied *Social Sciences for Peace and African Studies* and holds a language teaching diploma. She is currently enrolled in the master's programme in *Religious Sciences and Intercultural Mediation* at the University of Turin. She does not strictly belong to a Buddhist sangha, but she feels mostly connected to the Forest Theravada tradition and the Santacittarama monastery in Italy. She is originally Italian and lives in The Netherlands with her husband and daughter. She loves writing, reading children's books, learning languages and instruments, and spending time in nature with her family.



David Rycroft is director of Teach Peace. He is also a director of Mind With Heart, an international charity training teachers and students in sustainable wellbeing, emotional health and social connection. David has 20 years experience in training mindfulness instructors and school teachers in tools for emotional health and in sharing these with teenagers. Educated at Eton College and Edinburgh University, he taught art in a London secondary school for ten years before co-founding Mind With Heart. David is also a practising artist.



Guntram Ferstl is a Buddhist teacher at public schools in Vorarlberg (Austria) and a Buddhist mentor at the FMS-Altach, the first private school with Buddhist confessional recognition by the Austrian Buddhist Religious Society (ÖBR). He conducts research at the Buddhist Institute of the University College of Christian Churches of Teacher Education Vienna/Krems on topics of Buddhist religious education, interreligiousness and mysticism. He is student of Dzogchenmaster Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche and Zen priest in the soto line of Vanya Palmers.



Gabriela Frey - EBU Network Coordinator.

A Buddhist for over 40 years, she practices in the Tibetan Sakya tradition. Passionate about true gender equality in Buddhist communities, she founded Sakyadhita France, the French branch of the International Association of Buddhist Women, and established the network of Buddhist women in Europe.



Dario Doshin Girolami. M.Phil., is a Soto-Zen priest and a Dharma Teacher in the lineage of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. Former Adjunct Professor of Zen at John Cabot University and of Comparative Religion at the American University of Rome, he currently teaches Buddhism and holds regular seminars at the Faculty of Psychology at Sapienza University of Rome, and teaches Meditation at Rebibbia Prison - Rome. *Photo: Marco Girolami.*



Moritz Richartz - Moritz has been practicing (mainly Tibetan) Buddhism since a trip to the Himalayas in 2011. He combines ancient wisdom traditions with the modern business world as an independent consultant. For a few years now he is also the digital communications manager of the EBU. He lives in Germany and has a young son, whom he can't wait to start meditating with.

Editorial

Studying the Sutras and gaining an understanding of what the Buddha taught is an infinite task. The Dharma cannot be exhausted, and the path we walk as practitioners has no end.

Learning means improving ourselves, and especially in our fast-moving times, keeping up with new developments and gaining new skills can be very beneficial for our jobs and our private lives. I am always looking to expand my knowledge and pick up things that I haven't studied before. Throughout our life, we have the opportunity to learn. Isn't that exciting?

Study and improvement are not only a matter for the youth, although some of our EBU activities focus on just this – teaching kids. In this issue of our magazine, we want to give you an idea of what we are currently doing in the field of education and self-improvement:

David Rycroft (p.12) provides us with his rich experience about education in schools and how we could refine it, so our children can not only learn about mathematics and chemistry but how to be satisfied and happy in life as well. David is also heading "Teach Peace" (p.28), one of our projects in cooperation with the Italian Buddhist Union (UBI), which aims at providing kids with meaningful tools of conflict resolution, so they may live a harmonious and joyful life in balance with the people around them. Guntram Ferstl shares with us his experience in mentoring the first Buddhist school in Austria, and what it entails. Are young children enjoying meditation? Find out in his article (p.18).

Sara Manzi (p.6) tells us about her experience with the educational system in the Netherlands, especially when it comes to teaching Buddhism in schools. In addition, being also a mother, she presents some of her favorite Buddhist books for children (p.36), these are excellent tips if you are looking for a good gift or have small children on your own. Reverend Dario Doshin Girolami (p.32) is the team leader of the EBU chaplaincy commission, and within the framework of the first EBU chaplaincy conference in Rome last June, they presented a University curriculum for Buddhists wishing to become chaplains. This is a very important step for the development of Buddhist chaplaincy in Europe and a goal we have been working on in the last few years. Moritz Richartz (p.42) also focuses on coaching adults, by bringing mindfulness practices into the workplace from where it hopefully spills over to all other areas of life.

I do hope you will find our magazine as inspirational and entertaining as I, and if you feel you could contribute to one of our endeavors or projects, please let us know and come on board!

All my best in the Dharma,

Ron



Ron Eichhorn
European Buddhist Union
President



Ron Eichhorn is the president of the European Buddhist Union and a head disciple of the Supreme Matriarch Ji Kwang Dae Poep Sa Nim. He is abbot of the Berlin temple of the Yun Hwa Sangha and a professional film director. In his spare time, he likes to go sailing and plays the Ukulele.

Editorial

One day I was surprised to see my daughter wearing a baggy t-shirt as she was on her way to school. I especially liked this one as it was my old t-shirt from Plum Village saying: "Happy teachers change the World". I would continue the phrase with: for the better. As I've met happy teachers from Plum Village and other traditions I can truly relate to this. For example, The Plum Village approach to mindfulness in schools stresses that teachers and educators first establish their own mindfulness practice as a basis for their work in the classroom and other fields.

As a Yoga teacher I learned very early that we all are teachers and that learning is a lifelong journey. It never ends. This of course brings nice spice to life and every step and breath we take on it.

When You look back, what has made a teacher back in time helpful and beneficial to You, what comes to mind? For me at least that this person or being believed in me and the goodness and potential in me. In Buddhism we could talk about the Buddha Nature. With a clear mind I hope we all can give this gift to anyone passing by on this journey called life. As we all are teachers and students at the same time.

We have dedicated our Autumn issue to the theme Buddhism and education. Warmly welcome back to school because it truly is here and now.

Stay safe and warm!

Love

Emilia Amalā

Editor in chief

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"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Nelson Mandela



Emilia Amalā Raunio is a Dharma student from Helsinki, Finland. As a background in food science her interest is to heal the world together with our everyday actions. Emilia is a former council member of EBU and also one of the hosts in EBU's European Buddha Podcast. She enjoys walks in the forest, cooking plant based, swimming in all kinds of waters and there is always a place for a cup of green tea.



Buddha goes to school

By Sara Manzi

The Netherlands is a pluralistic, multi-religious, and secularised country with a decentralised educational system. In the last decades, the country has seen a decline in Roman Catholic and Protestant believers. In addition, according to Statistics Netherlands (CBS), six out of ten Dutch people are not religious, and for the first time in Dutch history, atheists and agnostics represent the majority. Nevertheless, the number of children who attend religious schools is about 60%. Since the Freedom of Education Act, signed by the government in 1917 and enshrined in Article 23 in 1987, educators are allowed to set up their curriculum, start their schools, or provide homeschooling. Dutch primary and secondary schools are divided into two categories: public-authority schools run by the government and private schools, or *Bijzonder Onderwijs*, literally in Dutch, particular schools, not to be confused with *Speciaal Onderwijs*

or special schools, specialised to deal with physical and/or learning disabilities. The private schools operate independently and are based on a specific religion or educational philosophy, such as Montessori, Steiner, Freinet, Dalton, Jenaplan, or Waldorf. Two-thirds of the children attend private schools. Both public and private schools receive government funding, a policy considered unique in Europe.

Denominational schools in the Netherlands follow a specific faith, such as Protestant, Evangelical, Reformed, Roman-Catholic, Islamic, Hindu, and Jewish. Many of these schools are moderate in their religious perspectives, and they are not allowed to discriminate by rejecting certain students or teachers. Since 1985, primary schools (both public and private) are obliged to provide the *Religious and Ideological Movements* class, which is based on objective religious lessons

aimed at familiarising students with the main world religions or worldviews. Besides that, children at a public-authority school have the right to follow, voluntarily, and generally in grade 5, 6, 7 or 8, extracurricular religious or humanistic classes provided by the external organisation Centre of Worldview Education (*Centrum van Vorming Onderwijs*, CVO), subsidized by the government and a cooperation of seven committees: Buddhist, Hindu, Humanistic, Islamic, Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant. The teachers provide lessons according to their philosophy of life, and in doing so they teach from their inner worldview perspective. Their main goal is to trigger an interactive and experiential learning process through which children reflect on what values and norms they consider important in their lives and what the effect of their behaviours is on others. The focus is indeed on the children and their identity development, and not on the

worldview. The school or/and the parents can choose out of two different programs: first, there is the possibility to opt for what is called the *Classical Model*: a worldview teacher comes over to teach once a week for 45 minutes for only those children of the same worldview and whose educators have specifically asked for it. The other option is the so-called *Carousel Model of Inter-Worldview Education*, meant for all children in class. Sometimes, four worldviews alternate, each of them teaching 10 weeks on a row. Sometimes, the children of two or three classes are mixed and split into smaller groups. Each group learns about a specific subject- such as 'Me and the other' - from one of the different worldviews, they have a common end-session about the theme -what did you learn or experience? - and then

they alternate. In one year, all children get more acquainted with three or four worldviews. The *Carousel Model* intends to expose children to several worldviews and encourage them to make connections and find common ground among the different traditions. Over the past few years, in Europe, the *Inter-Worldviews Educational Model* has been increasingly promoted by both political and educational policymakers because it nourishes mutual understanding, a critical mind, social cohesion, and respect for diversity. In addition, through dialogical learning, the children practice how to interact with others on life matters and how to inhabit the pluralistic microcosm that school personifies.

While the Humanist, Protestant and Catholic varieties are by far the most popular, the

Buddhist worldview currently has seven Buddhist teachers working for over 35 schools. The Buddhist Worldview Education (*Boeddhistisch Vormingsonderwijs BVO*) exists since 2018 and is growing. Its final responsibility is in the Buddhist Union of the Netherlands (*Boeddhistische Unie Nederland*, or BUN).

The BUN was founded in 1990 as an association of Buddhist sangha's in the Netherlands and is now an official religious partner of the State. The teachers hold a teaching diploma and follow training provided by the Centre of Worldview Education and a second one by the BVO. Through an internal platform, teachers can share their experience, what worked or did not work in the lessons, adapt their materials, or add new resources.



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When they started, explains Helma Ton, the head of BVO in a recent interview, five teachers from different Buddhist sanghas worked together to find a common ground for the curriculum. In the end, they selected ten subjects considered important in Buddhism: interconnectedness, generosity, Brahmavihāra (compassion, sympathetic joy, loving kindness towards oneself and others, and contentment), perception, impermanence, honest

communication, and mindfulness. In the lessons, the teachers use different methods: stories, videos, games, and creative assignments, and generally, they end with a mindfulness exercise, such as listening to the bell or breathing. Usually, in the first two lessons, the children learn a couple of stories about Prince Siddharta and get acquainted with the Buddhist context. In the following lessons, teachers focus more on experiential learning than on cognitive and

content-based information. Instead of saying, 'We believe that...', the teachers share how they address life's issues according to their Buddhist practice. The children are then invited to pose questions and share their experiences, opinions, and reflections. In addition, they are stimulated to explore what the wisdom of the Buddha can mean concretely in their lives. The BVO motto is 'do not take anything for granted but investigate for yourself what is helpful (or 'kusala'



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beneficial) and what is not helpful ('akusala' un-beneficial). And not only for yourself but also for others.' The primary goal, points out Helma, is that the children are stimulated to get along in life with wisdom and compassion.

The BVO provides lessons in collaboration with other worldview teachers. Helma underlines that the *Inter-Worldviews Education* concept is typically Buddhist because children, learning from several worldviews, might choose what works best for them. In other schools where the *Classical Model* is requested, parents who apply for Buddhist classes for their children are generally Westerners interested in mindfulness, adds Helma. The ethnic Buddhists instead seem to prefer Christian schools because they want their children assimilate the values and norms of the country, they live in. Being Buddhist is a way of life and part of their culture, and their children do not need to learn it at school.

As research has shown, storytelling connects children to their imagination and new ideas and engages them in further discussion. As Silvie Walraven, a Buddhist teacher at BVO since 2018, explains, the children generally appreciate the stories about Prince Siddhartha, and they like to share what resonates with them about the story. Stories are not only a means to talk about the Buddhist tradition and moral concepts, but they also serve as a bridge to reflection and sharing moments among the students and with the teacher.

For example, when Siddhartha sits under the tree and Mara tries to distract him, the youngsters see Mara as the monster who hides under your bed when it is time to go to sleep. The teacher encourages the children to view Mara not as a real monster or demon but as diverting or upsetting thoughts and feelings, trying to distract Siddhartha from what he intends to do. Often, after this story, the children share how they try to deal with their thoughts or give tips to each other.

Silvie adds: 'In the class, we try to avoid terms such as bad and good because it is important that children realise that in Buddhism, a behaviour could be helpful or unhelpful, and no living being is itself bad or good.' In addition, a trusting and unjudgmental environment is crucial to boosting participation and respectful communication among the pupils. The biggest challenge in her lessons is when children are not interested or open to participating or exchanging their views with their peers. On the contrary, one of the nicest sides of the lesson is when a child comes to school and shares how mindfulness has helped her fall asleep, and when they feel comfortable enough to talk openly about their personal experiences. When unexpected situations happen in the classroom, Silvie stresses that it is important that the teacher create space, give appropriate attention to the issue, and explain how, as a Buddhist, she would deal with it. It is crucial to create a safe sphere

where they can share their ideas without fear of being silenced by stronger opinions. Sometimes strong emotions might arise in the classroom, and that is the right opportunity to acknowledge what is happening and be aware that those are sensitive subjects that need to be brought up to a normal level. Especially coming from Buddhism, she considers the psychological side of the mind an interesting part to develop.

In conclusion, teaching has the critical role of arousing pupils' potential and educating them to become active citizens able to embrace diversity and pluralism. In our complex and intersectional societies, it becomes essential to acknowledge how interconnected we are and that living harmoniously together is the ultimate human wish. While *Inter-Worldviews Education* supports a culture of peace and justice, Buddhism contributes to cultivating a compassionate and insightful way of being and acting in the world, no matter what you believe or consider to be your spiritual or secular path. 🧘



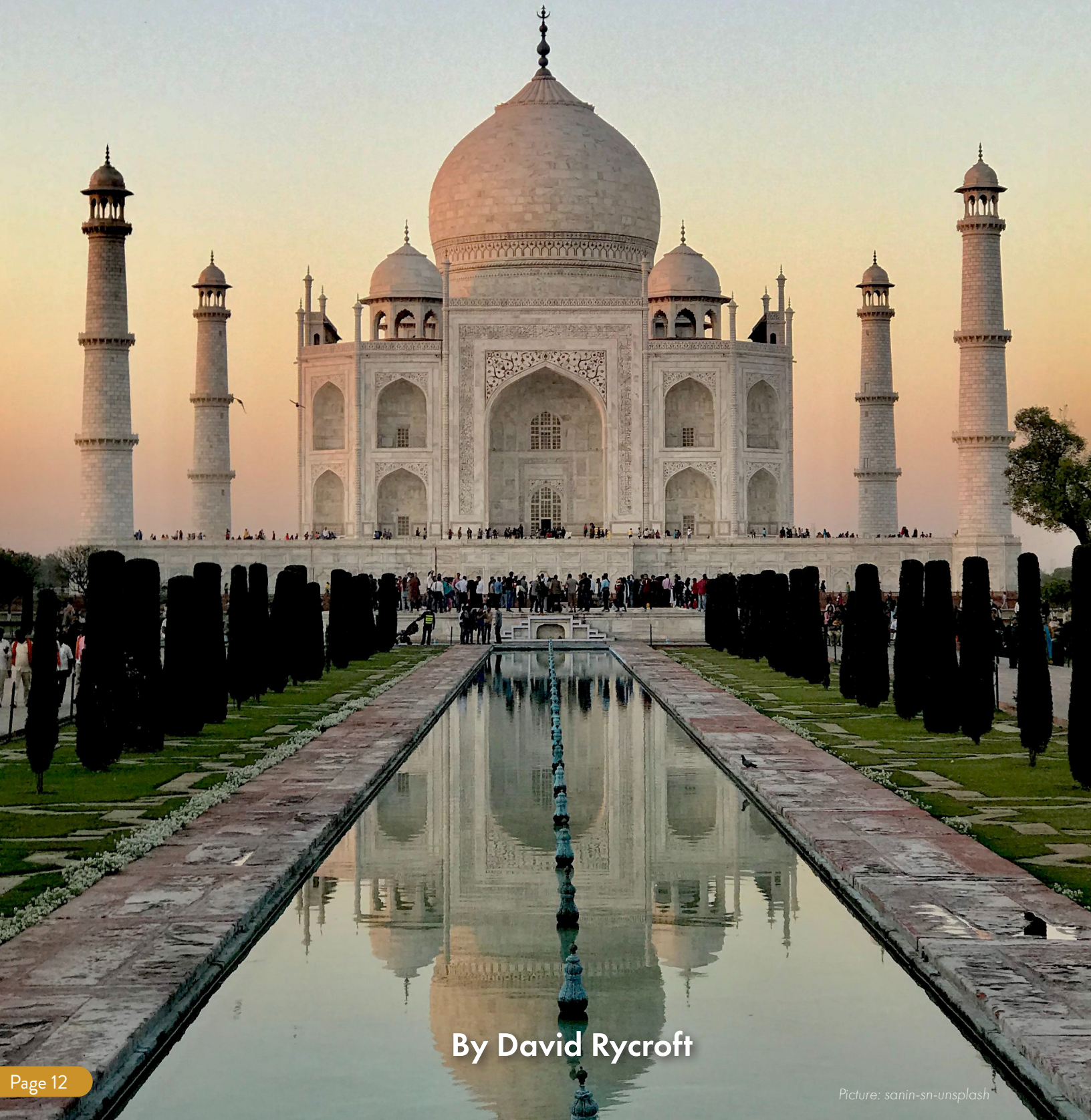
Helma Ton is head of BVO, a certified trainer in (interpersonal) mindfulness and compassion (MBSR, MBCL), a Deep Listening and Mindful Speech trainer, and chairwoman of Sangha Metta, a Dutch foundation that organises vipassana retreats. She studied Italian Language and Literature, and she worked as a translator and in politics as an alderman and mayor.

Silvie Walraven is a primary school teacher and Buddhist teacher, a mindfulness trainer for children and adults, and the director of the Maitreya Institute of Tibetan Buddhism in Amsterdam. She lived in Bhutan and Nepal for 15 years, where she worked as a teacher at a Dutch local school.

Website: <https://boeddhistischvormingsonderwijs.nl/>

IN AND OUT

**What contemplative perspectives from ancient India
can bring to 21st century education in Europe**



By David Rycroft

One of the things my wife rolls her eyes to is when - yet again - I start lecturing everyone within earshot about the two types of happiness. And yet, however many times we have heard about 'hedonism' and 'eudaemonia', these two types of happiness are relevant when we come to reflect on education. Why? Because one main purpose of education is to set us up for life. And one main purpose of life is to be happy.

.....

So, in case you missed it, the Ancient Greeks referred to the first type of happiness as 'hedonism'. It's a happiness, or pleasure, based on the physical senses. The Ancient Greeks called the other type of happiness 'eudaemonia'. This refers to well-being coming from within the mind. Currently, our society and its education system are implicitly dominated by hedonism, and its belief that we can generate human happiness through the manipulation

of - and the consumption of - the outside world. Advocates of eudaemonia, sometimes translated as 'genuine human flourishing', suggest that it is only if we also train the mind, and cultivate inner qualities of peace, compassion and wisdom, that we will generate and sustain happiness.

Education: acquiring knowledge

If we look at how we acquire knowledge - which is one of the key principles of education - we can see that there are two main approaches. One approach is the 'from the outside in', a perspective championed by modern science. The other approach is 'from the inside out', as practised by scholars and yogis in ancient India. Initially, these approaches might seem to be contradictory, but because they have different strengths and because their domains are distinct, these approaches can be used to compliment each other.

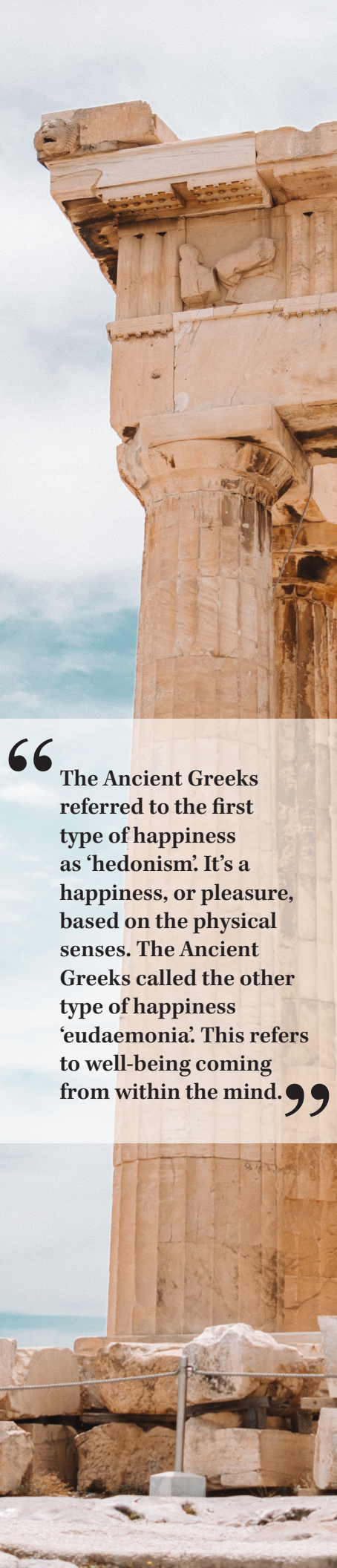
Outside in

Western civilisation has sought to understand the nature of reality from the outside in. Since the time of Aristotle, we have been seeking neat models to describe reality. Galileo can be described as the founder of modern science, with his quest to see the universe more clearly and explain it with greater accuracy. And Einstein's beautiful mathematics describe how an 'independently existing' universe behaves. The question this 'outside in' approach is seeking to answer is 'What does the universe look like when we're not looking? Scientists are looking for 'objectivity', where all subjective influences from the human side are eliminated. This objectivity is achieved when scientists' findings are published by reputable publishers, reviewed by their peers and consensus finds that yes, this is how things are. The truth has been captured in a concept, or a series of concepts, that can be commonly understood.

Difficulties emerge with this approach when we start looking at the human mind. The mind is not objective, not physical, not quantifiable, and it's totally invisible to all methods of scientific enquiry. In order to 'square this circle', one solution that scientists have found is to 'reduce' the mind to equate it with the brain.

Unfortunately, this conclusion that many scientists have come to, has no evidence. One of the consequences of this conclusion is that knowledge about 'you' and 'I' are completely absent, apart perhaps from being described as a complex mass of neurons. This 'unconscious bias' of valuing the physical over the mental - the objective over the subjective - has filtered through to our education system.

When you have an education system based on 'outside in' knowledge, we may be able to produce brilliant scientists who can build fantastic technology, but we are also missing some crucial knowledge about ourselves. This lack of tools to cultivate self awareness and emotional health easily leads to a viral spread of anxiety, depression and a whole host of other toxic states of mind. If and when mental ill-health is diagnosed, the predominant solution given is physical. We are prescribed pharmaceutical drugs which will only ever - in the best case - alleviate the symptoms, without ever addressing the causes.



“The Ancient Greeks referred to the first type of happiness as ‘hedonism’. It’s a happiness, or pleasure, based on the physical senses. The Ancient Greeks called the other type of happiness ‘eudaemonia’. This refers to well-being coming from within the mind.”

Inside out

The approach of ancient Indian contemplatives also has its weaknesses. There is very little physics, no science of the brain, no smart phones, no technology and the geography is disputable. In the 'inside out' approach, we assume that the mind has a role, because the main type of knowledge we're interested in is experiential. This knowledge and experience includes how to relate to the thoughts and emotions that arise in the mind, as well as how to cultivate healthy emotions and qualities of mind that lead to sustainable wellbeing for both ourselves and others. The 'inside out' approach can also include insights into the nature of consciousness itself. This knowledge is subjective and, as such, is much more difficult to communicate and evaluate.

In the ancient university of Nalanda in northern India, thousands of students were trained in cultivating wisdom. The central principle was inner knowledge, and their 'curriculum' was divided into four main branches - logic, medicine, 'voice' (including language and music) and 'society' (including the visual arts and engineering). Each of these branches of knowledge manifested from a deep knowledge of ultimate reality, as experienced by teachers having accomplished shamatha and vipashyana meditation. And, in a reciprocal way, students gained a finer understanding of

reality through training in these four branches of knowledge.

This 'inside out' approach is a very different because it is all about subjective experience, not objective 'fact'. If we start with a basic question like "what's the reality of suffering?", we don't ask "What's the reality of suffering when nobody's experiencing it?" That question does not make sense.

'Inside out' education involves questions that are about our lives, about reality that we experience and not a reality existing independently of our experience.

One obvious example of 'inside out' pedagogy is the Buddha's teaching on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. The opening question is something like 'What's it like to be embodied?' What's it like to look from the inside out? When you observe the body with stable and clear attention, without getting caught in conceptualizations, images or associations, what do you observe?

Radical empiricism

Actually, this approach does share common ground with science. When Galileo was looking through his telescope he was not just conceptualising about planets and stars. He was actually observing very carefully. Galileo started modern science with direct, precise, sophisticated and replicable observation. And that's very similar to what we do in contemplative practice. We

“Galileo started modern science with direct, precise, sophisticated and replicable observation. And that's very similar to what we do in contemplative practice.”

find out about the nature of reality by observing carefully: observing sensations, feelings, thoughts and emotions. We can even practise awareness of awareness, letting the mind 'simply be', resting in the clarity and knowing of awareness itself. This is radical empiricism: even if a thousand scientists told us what, according to them, the mind was, we would not even be tempted to buy into their rhetoric and metaphysical assumptions.

What is school for?

Education commentators often remark that students and teachers are obsessed with grades. Grades are indicators of success and are the dominant passport to higher education and, subsequently, better jobs. Schools do their best to assure prospective parents that their establishment is particularly good at educating the 'whole child' and that student flourishing is paramount. While it is evident that mental wellbeing is higher up the school agenda than in previous generations, this is sometimes still a tick-box exercise or an area where staff feel ill-equipped to address student needs.

Many schools are left struggling with how to cultivate genuine human flourishing, and some simply ignore the question because addressing the depth of this unknown potential would, simply, be overwhelming.

So what to do? The first step is to educate school teachers in tools for emotional health and mental wellbeing, and also to educate



them in how to pass these tools on to their students.

But leaving inner knowledge at the level of student emotional health, while commendable, still indicates a 'dumbing-down' and 'pigeon-holing' of inner knowledge. It becomes either an optional extra for the privileged few, or it's reserved for those with an alternative lifestyle, along with a vegan diet and trips to Nepal. If emotional health is left on the margins, the materialists' status quo has not really been challenged.

For schools to be committed to culture-change prioritising eudaemonia whole-heartedly, they need to have firm conviction not only in the resulting benefits but also in the causes and conditions to be put in place.

There is much work to be done in bridging the gap between the daily challenges of running a school and utopian ideals of world peace and a healthy planet. This work involves supporting senior managers, head teachers, school governors and decision makers in their reflections on what schools are really for, and what future we want for society.

When school leaders come to a personal commitment regarding the flourishing of their students, they become powerful agents of change. As these individuals communicate their vision to colleagues, a movement starts growing and pilot projects emerge. Over a year or two, more teachers see the benefits of cultivating 'inner knowledge' and perhaps a course is proposed for an entire

year group. The gold standard, which is still rare, is to see a 'whole school approach', where all staff and students, and many parents, are aware of the schools intentions regarding eudaemonia.

To conclude, the 'bad news' is that education habits are very strong, and many teachers are already so overwhelmed with existing work that they often don't have the mind-space to 'think outside the box'. The 'good news' is that many initiatives promoting 'inner knowledge' in education exist, including Teach Peace [teach-peace.org]. These initiatives provide not only a vision of personal and societal flourishing but also a step-by-step path for schools to emerge from old habits and create new cultures where emotional intelligence and social responsibility are the norm. 🧘





This article is partly based on a teaching by Alan Wallace, Buddhist scholar and teacher practising in the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism.

A transcript can be found at:

<https://media.sbinstitute.com/courses/fall2012/06-mindfulness-of-the-body-2/>



FMS-Altach

Insights into a Buddhist school!

By Guntram Ferstl

For the past four years, the Austrian private school Freie Montessori Schule - Altach (FMS-Altach) with Buddhist confessional recognition by the Austrian Buddhist Religious Society (ÖBR) has been undergoing a transformation to integrate Buddhist practice and wisdom – a report.

Please, take a little fantasy journey with me. Imagine that your Buddha eye is open and you see what is happening in a morning lesson in the Lynx class in Altach, Austria. The students, aged 6 to 9, are painting and doing handicrafts - everything is happening calmly and with a good humor. But then the door opens and a nice young woman comes in and strikes the singing bowl - Gong Gong Gong. Three girls raise their heads and go together to the teacher and ask: May we? The teacher nods and the girls leave the classroom with a smile and go to a room at the end of the corridor. There is a door opened just a small gap. In complete silence, they go inside. In the room are a teacher and several other students sitting on a meditation cushions. Most of the students have their eyes closed

and seem to be enjoying the energy. peace, silence ... Few minutes later, two boys leave the meditation room and walk out, but the door remains open a small gap. ... (because closing the door makes noise during meditation).

For me, as a mentor on Buddhist issues, I wanted to show how the open meditation lesson works. Experiencing this as a teacher is amazing and wonderful - the meditation lesson tops the charts. Each week, students have the opportunity to visit the meditation room for one lesson as long as they want.

But back to the origin of Buddhist history at FMS-Altach. In Austria we have an interesting situation for Buddhist students, because

Buddhism has been a state-recognized religion in Austria since 1983. On the one hand, this means that Buddhist students can be taught by Buddhist teachers at school. This is very rare in Europe. On the other hand, there is a special law for private schools in Austria that creates financial advantages if the school has state religious recognition. In May 2019, FMS-Altach became the first private school to receive Buddhist denominational recognition from the Austrian Buddhist Religious Society (ÖBR). About 9 or 10 months before, the board of FMS-Altach was very eager to contact ÖBR. At first the ÖBR showed not a big interest in a Buddhist school. But the board did not let up and tried again and presented ÖBR with an elaborated concept. The persistence of the FMS-Altach and

the concept signaled seriousness. Several conferences followed to clarify the legal provisions and Buddhist guidelines. But what does state recognition mean in the example of FMS-Altach? When we started in the school year 2019/20, there was no person with a Buddhist confession at the school, but many parents who are positive about Buddhist practice and wisdom. The board of FMS-Altach wanted to have a Buddhist teacher as a mentor at the school. Here I came on the scene because I am the only teacher in the State of Vorarlberg. The idea was that the mentor would lead a process that would bring the students, parents

and teachers into contact with Buddhist practice and teachings. At the same time, when I started as mentor, Alexandra Matt became English teacher in FMS-Altach. She is very important, because she is also a Buddhist and gave from the beginning a lot of support in the whole process. The principal and I took a very gentle approach the first year, because we didn't want to mission or indoctrinate. We wanted to make offers, for example workshops called "Happy like a Buddha". Some students attended these workshops and were enthusiastic about the meditation and the stories about Buddha and the Buddhist

Dharma. For the parents, I gave three lectures as an introduction to Buddhism, but a few months later Covid 19 rocked the world. A time when people learned a lot about digital communications, through YouTube I gave several meditation instructions. In the second year we have set up classes on Buddhism and philosophy in the afternoons for two groups. One group for the little ones and a second for the older students. This was extraordinary because of the time spent on classes during free time.

In the 3rd year, we set up BREP (buddhism religion ethics philosophy) in the morning classes for the students with no religious

Bhante and teachers





engraving mani stones



opening ceremony with choir



open meditation lesson

affiliation. We had three classes, for the youngest students (6-9 years old), the intermediate students (10-12 years old) and the oldest students (13-14 years old). Each class lesson starts with singing the refuge song and a few minutes of meditation. They learned about the life of Buddha and the Dharma. The oldest students were very interested in reincarnation. The youngest ones like the rituals at the altar, the lighting of the candle, the offering of incense and love the chanting of the Refuge.

The same year, the board set up a working group for Buddhist events. Three parents and I had the task to

think about events and workshops for the adults. We decided to organize a big event for the Vesakh festival. A festival for children and adults was our aim where the people feel the spirit of Asia with peace and happiness. We called the festival Buddha Day and had an amazing program. Students performed a play about „Buddha and the wild elephant Nalagiri“. Bhante Sujatha, a monk from Sri Lanka gave us a Dharma talk and meditations. The people were inspired. Children painted chinees calligraphy, made Mala necklaces and engraved Mani-stones. Yoga lessons and a lecture about aryu veda were other programs

for adults. Vegetarian food, delicious cakes and non alcohol drinks rounded the program and took care of the physical needs. Altogether, the Budda Day sent blessed dharma-vibes in to school. Especially because Bhante Sujatha spent time with all the students and teachers at the school for Dharma talks and meditations in the run-up to Buddha Day. It was a great Dharma fortune for us that Alexandra Matt hosted Bhante Sujatha and we were able to invite him as a special guest with his qualities of loving kindness.

Now in the 4th year, parents can participate in meditation

scene Siddhartha and the swan



Guntram at
Buddha Day 2023



students of BREP with mentor

workshops, such as metta meditation, vipassana meditation, or Tibetan meditation practices. We also set up an open meditation session for the students every week, led by several teachers in some weeks – as I told in the introduction.

The biggest event was the second Buddha Day with many interesting program items: Dharma talk by Bhante Sujatha, a talk on mindfulness education for parents, a mantra concert and a yoga class. The play “Prince Siddhartha and the Swan” performed by the middle-aged students was fantastic. They had wonderful costumes and acted

very professionally and with a lot of enthusiasm. The children were very happy as they made mala necklaces, sand mandalas and engraved mani stones. A choir accompanied the event especially at the beginning and at the closing ritual. In perfect weather, parents offered homemade delicious vegan food and sweet cakes. So many helpful and inspired people made this event possible - a great blessing to all. The entire event was free, only DANA boxes invited generosity. The proceeds will help needy mothers in Sri Lanka, who are supported by Bhante Sujatha.

For next year, the principal has opened access to BREP classes to Catholic students as well. This means that a total of about 50 students will attend BREP.

It has been shown in the last four years that we have very good conditions for Dharma because the cooperation with the board and the principal Heidi Haas is excellent and many parents are very motivated to support the spiritual development at the school. All in all, a lot of good things have happened at FMS-Altach in the last four years and we hope that the Dharma will take more and more roots. 🧘

closing ceremony

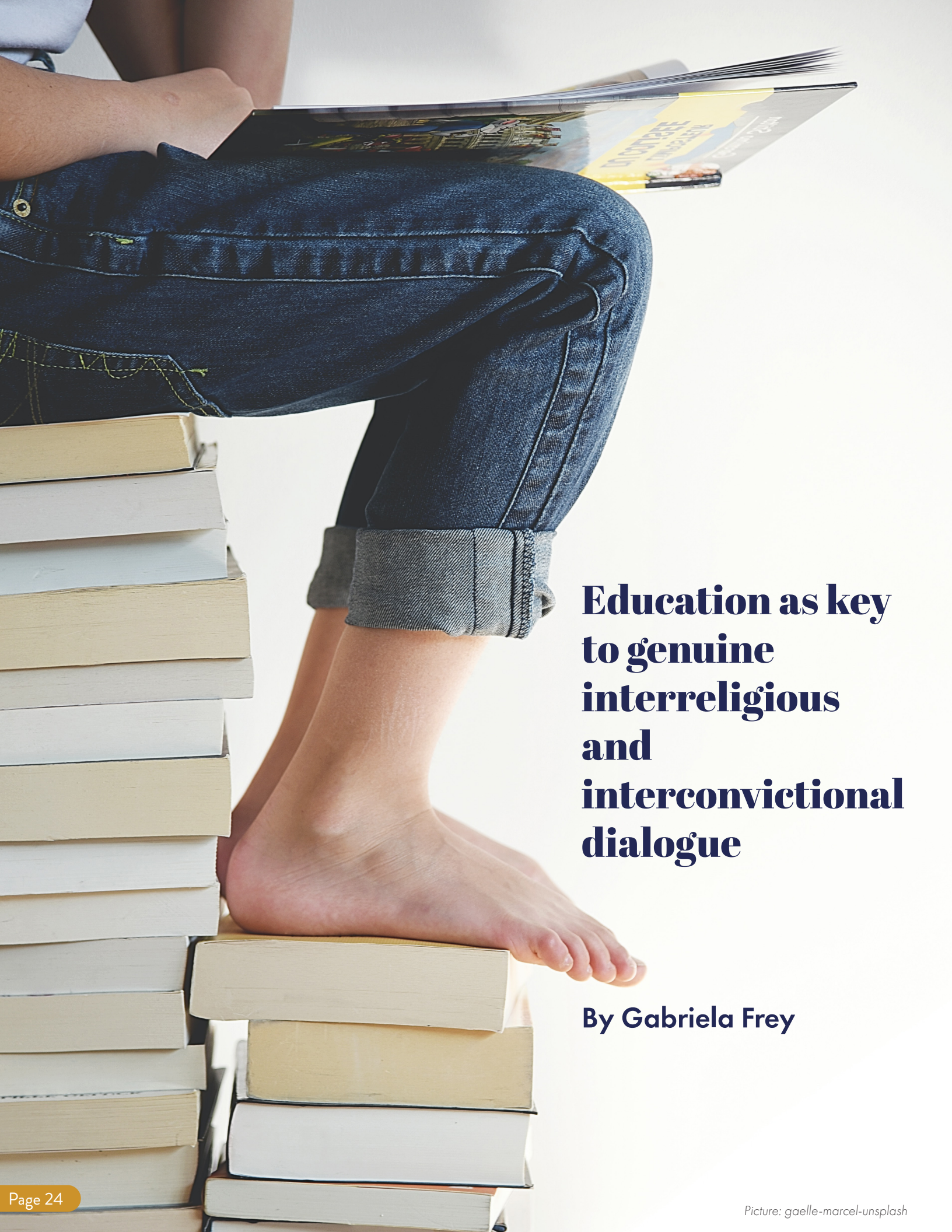


Siddhartha and Devadatta



map Buddhas hiking trails segumann

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Education as key to genuine interreligious and interconvictional dialogue

By Gabriela Frey

Education in the sense of the German word “Bildung”, includes professional training, fact-based learning, culture, knowledge, and personality development, up to and including critical discernment and a sense of social responsibility. In this sense, education is not limited to school but is a lifelong activity. Education in the sense of knowledge and the perception of how others think and feel is holistic and concerns the whole human individual. Empathy, respect and self-reflection are essential aspects of this education. In this sense, education is foremost about learning self-critical analysis of one’s positions in relation with others who think and feel differently. For this reason, one should consider education to be an essential element of dialogue, especially the field of inter-religious and interconvictional dialogue.

A Committee for the Interreligious & interconvictional Dialogue

In Europe, the Abrahamic religions played an important role in

creating identity and preserving traditions. At the INGOS conference in the Council of Europe, the European Buddhist Union created a committee for interreligious and interconvictional dialogue in order to bring new aspects into the European debates. Buddhism is partly based on different philosophical foundations. At least in Europe, Buddhist communities are not involved in the construction of classical cultural and national identity. Buddhism can therefore offer new perspectives without the usual historical burden. The Dialogue Committee is not limited to religious belief systems; it is open to other worldview communities and to dialogue with secular and religious philosophies.

The committee focus on the fundamental importance and role of education for interreligious and interconvictional dialogue in the many forms of dialogue groups that exist in our societies to date. Despite all the considerable efforts, one cannot help but notice that the expanded and tolerant communication skills that are being

aimed at do not necessarily lead to an improved and balanced understanding of the Other. What aspects of education and training must we focus on in order to achieve a more understanding, tolerant, balanced and respectful coexistence of the religions and worldviews involved? They are all based on behaviour, core attitudes and values. Values are usually not purely abstract concepts, but are closely related to emotions, which are both extensive and very complex. Recognising and understanding them in others is facilitated by education - but not alone. The committee explores in debates and webinars how effective education and training are in helping people understand each other’s values and attitudes. It is important to explore the feelings associated with these values and attitudes. It is crucial to find and highlight new ways to empower existing religious and interconvictional dialogue groups to focus their attention on the importance and role of education - formal and informal – and making it more inclusive and inspiring.

Genuine Diversity and Inclusiveness

The distinction between formal and non-formal education is important because the latter goes beyond school education in terms of age, structure and scope, but is an essential aspect in shaping a democratic society. The importance of such a comprehensive understanding of education becomes even clearer as the increase in freely accessible digital resources in recent years has shaped our modern culture to an unimagined extent in terms of information overload and the need to critically engage with it. Many religious and belief communities must resort to informal education because they are often not represented in formal school

education programs. However, religious education - if it is part of the state curriculum - is often not taken seriously and comes second in the priority of subjects.

The Committee's faith-based member organizations therefore focus their research on informal educational programs offered by religious and faith-based communities and organizations that engage in dialogue as equals and in the spirit of mutual learning. What they all have in common is that they not only promote dialogue, but deliberately offer tools and strategies against hate, racism and discrimination. It is interesting to see how they respond to the new phenomena of digital media. In our opinion, there is a great need for exchange and

mutual learning in Europe. While there are fairly comprehensive studies on formal education, there is a lack of in-depth understanding of the informal sector, where there is often a lack of quality assessment.

Therefore, the committee focuses on finding examples of good practices, especially at the grassroots level, to support the development of a more inclusive educational programs and projects. The committee holds seminars and organizes webinars to support interested parties on this path but its heartfelt goal, however, is to finally see the Council of Europe establish a permanent platform for interreligious and interconfessional dialogue. 🧘



Gabriela Frey, European Buddhist Union (EBU)

Conference of INGOs – Council of Europe

Committee for the Interreligious & interconvictional Dialogue

www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/interreligious-and-interconvictional-dialogue





Can schools teach peace?

By David Rycroft



Teach Peace

What do you remember from your school days?

Many respond to this question by naming their favourite teacher and some of the more unusual things that we got up to, and maybe something that one of our teachers said to us that particularly resonated with us.

Favourite teacher?

What makes a teacher our 'favourite teacher'?

It may well have been their mastery and passion for their subject, and we may even remember something that they taught us. For example, 35 years on, I still remember a lesson on the Renaissance that a brilliant, and rather eccentric, art historian taught us; the majority of what I know and love about Leonardo de Vinci is thanks to 45 minutes in 1988.

We may also chose our favourite teacher based on their personality - something about their obvious kindness and commitment to their profession earned them our respect. We probably did not thank them at the time, in fact, we may have seen them as scary rather than friendly. But, in hindsight, we are grateful for the care they took over our education.

It's emotional

But both brilliance and care may not be enough to make someone our favourite teacher. Have you ever heard anyone talk about, for example, their 'favourite bank manager'? Probably not. The reason we find it normal to talk about a 'favourite teacher' is that the relationship is human. It's emotional. This person managed to inspire us. Their speech and behaviour resonated with us; maybe their attitude to authority was a little rebellious, like our own. If we can't remember exactly what they taught us, we may well remember how they made us feel. This ability to be comfortable in oneself, 'bien dans sa peau' as the French say, and to connect with others on a heart level is precious. It's a quality of 'being' that can make a huge difference in the way teachers - well, all of us - communicate.

Educating the heart

If you want to know the future, to see what society will be like in the next generation, one good place to look would be at the education of our young people today. Young people learn not only with the intellect - remembering and then forgetting facts - but also with the heart. The essence of 'educating

the heart' is realising that we are all members of one human family. This is a powerful message articulated by the Dalai Lama, one that he has been advocating for many years. The key is that 'educating the heart' cannot be imparted through books; it happens invisibly, through osmosis. Students learn by absorbing what the teacher embodies and models.

Emotional health

When teachers embody self-awareness and emotional health, students learn by example and school cultures evolve accordingly. Because teachers' moods set the tone for the whole school, it is crucial that schools actively take care of teachers' emotional health. Any project looking at strengthening values of peace, social cohesion and eudaemonia in future society would do well, then, to start with the emotional health of today's teachers.

Teach Peace

Motivated by such a wish, the European Buddhist Union launched an education project in January 2023. As the project recognises the important role of teachers, the project is called Teach Peace [teach-peace.org]. Teach Peace is

a secular initiative, bringing tools for personal and societal peace to young people, whatever their gender, religion, ethnicity, disability or sexuality. The vision of Teach Peace is for schools to be beacons of human flourishing and social cohesion.

Vision

Teach Peace takes its vision from the primary aim of the EU, to 'promote peace, its values and the well-being of its citizens'.

The approach of Teach Peace is to focus on training school teachers to introduce skills for cultivating peace and social cohesion to students. This training starts with school teachers cultivating peace for themselves. In the pilot phase of the project, around forty teachers from 5 schools in 4 European countries undergo an 18-hour training over 3 months. At the end of this, they introduce 'peace skills' to around

200 students in their school, simple exercises for cultivating both mental balance and social cohesion. The project will reach 1000 students by March 2024.

Teach Peace is partnering with three education charities to co-design interventions that are tailored to the particular needs of each school situation. The partner organisations are Mind With Heart [mindwithheart.org], The Foundation for Compassion and Wisdom [compassionandwisdom.org] and WakeUp Schools [wakeupschools.org].

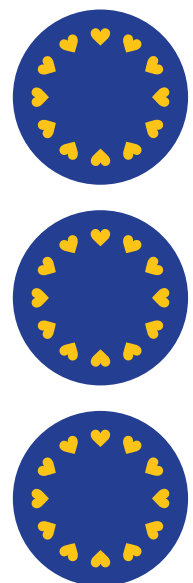
One of the initial sources of inspiration for Teach Peace is the Dalai Lama, and his support of Gandhi's message of non-violence. In his 2011 book *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World*, the Dalai Lama puts the case for 'secular ethics' and how these can be transmitted through schools.

Approach

Peace means not only the lack of violent conflicts, but also the presence of justice and equity, as well as respect for human rights and for the Earth.

Peace involves both internal and external processes. When teachers embody peace and emotional health, students learn by example. Mary Gordon, the founder of education programme 'Roots of Empathy' says that 'the absence of empathy is a common denominator in child abuse, neglect, and domestic violence. Empathy cannot be taught in the traditional ways, but it can be caught through experiential learning.'

Sustainable change towards a culture of peace happens when a critical mass of teachers in a school make a personal commitment to peace. This change takes time, and teachers persist because they see directly the benefit on both



Picture:
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themselves and their students.
Teachers lead by example.

Mind with Heart is an award-winning UK-based charity training teachers and students in sustainable wellbeing, emotional health and social connection. The experience of Mind With Heart shows that the most effective approach to improve the emotional climate of a school is to focus on the teachers. When a group of teachers work together to improve levels of peace and social connection, whole-school culture can change in a sustainable way.



Pilot phase

The Teach Peace website [teach-peace.org] was launched in March 2023 and school teachers in our networks were invited to express interest in building a Peace project in their school. From this initial communication, five schools are finalising preparations. Teachers will be trained and ready to introduce 'peace tools' to students in January 2024.

The focus on teachers, and starting with teachers' well-being is a significant approach. Strengthening teacher well-being, and a common sense of purpose among teachers, may take longer to establish than other initiatives, but the results reach further. Our approach is to encourage co-design between experienced teacher-trainers and the teachers they are training. We also encourage trainers from different countries to share best practice with each other. We

support self-reflection, and careful project design to fit the specific needs of each school.

Next steps

Relationships between teacher trainers and senior managers in schools have now been established. Teachers have been invited to commit to 18 hours of training. This is a significant commitment, on top of their already-overwhelming schedules. The next steps are for teachers to cultivate a sense of common purpose around the peace project, and to learn from experienced trainers what works (and what doesn't) when introducing 'peace tools' to students of different ages. As a reward for their commitment to peace, teachers will be offered a 3-day retreat in beautiful and inspiring surroundings where they will have an opportunity to relax, share with each other and deepen their own experience of peace.

A quick experiment

Teach Peace is about experimenting first-hand with a range of exercises that promote peace (both inner and outer) and healthy social connection.

Are you ever an example for teenagers? Do you realise that you are shaping the future through the example you are setting? If so, would you consider reflecting on what helps you set a 'good example'? Feel free to get in touch with Teach Peace to share your insights... 🧘



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The first European Buddhist Union chaplaincy conference

By Dario Doshin Girolami



Buddhist chaplaincy is an emerging

field in Europe. Centro Zen L'Arco, in collaboration with the EBU Chaplaincy Network and the Department of Psychology at Sapienza University, with the financial contribution of the Italian Buddhist Union and with the patronages of the European Buddhist Union and of Religions for Peace Europe, organized in Rome, at Sapienza University and at Centro Zen L'Arco, the first European Buddhist Chaplaincy Conference from the 23rd to the 25th of June. An exciting programme of speakers, workshops and discussions to foster dialogue amongst Dharma practitioners serving in the areas of health, end-of-life-care and prisons.

Speakers included Dharma teachers, researchers, pioneers, changemakers and other faith leaders from across Europe and the United States.

As the sun and the clouds alternated on the seven hills of

Rome, similarly the speakers took turns on the stage, resulting in a long friendly conversation, followed by more than fifty people, in attendance and online. The conference was opened by the vibrant speeches of Ron Eichhorn, president of the European Buddhist Union, Filippo Scianna, president of the Italian Buddhist Union and Luigi De Salvia, President of Religions for Peace Italy and Europe. That beginning set the tone for the harmony that reigned throughout the conference, which marked a turning point in the development of Buddhist Chaplaincy in Europe.

Rev. Joan Halifax Roshi, Abbot of Upaya Zen Center and Hospice Caregiver, spoke about the practice her chaplaincy connecting it with Sila, Samadhi, Prajna. Her sweet voice, her deep wisdom moved us all. Ven. Ajahn Khemadhammo - Phra Bhavanaviteht, Spiritual Director of Angulimala spoke about the evolution of Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy in the UK. Ven. Dr. Carola Roloff, Buddhist Nun, Professor of Buddhism at the University of Hamburg spoke about buddhist chaplaincy in Europe from an academic perspective.

Dr. Monica Sanford, Assistant Dean for Multireligious Ministry at Harvard University spoke about Kalyanamitra - a model for Buddhist spiritual care, presenting a research and analysis into the professional practice of Buddhist spiritual care based on the work of actual chaplains. Rev. Elena Seishin Viviani, Italian Buddhist Union Religious Ministers coordinator, spoke about the religious ministers and the spiritual assistants of the Italian Buddhist Union.

Yours truly, Rev. Dario Doshin Girolami, Abbot of Centro Zen L'Arco, Prison Chaplain, EBU Chaplaincy Network Coordinator and chief organizer of the Conference, spoke about buddhist meditation in prison: how to meet every single inmate as a Buddha and not as a monster. Kirsten DeLeo, Meditation Teacher, Trainer in Contemplative Care and EBU Chaplaincy Network steering group, spoke about Buddhist chaplains in end-of-life care. Keith Munnings - Meditation Teacher, Hospital Chaplain, and EBU Chaplaincy Network steering group, spoke about what qualifies a Buddhist practitioner for chaplaincy. Prof. Antonino Raffone, Professor of

Neuroscience, Sapienza University and conference co-organizers spoke about his scientific research on chaplaincy and its benefits.

Dr. Stefano Bettera, EBU vice president, chaired the interfaith panel discussion, introduced by Dr. Luigi De Salvia. F. Baby Ellickal, Catholic Chaplain, Dr. David Gerbi, psychologist and president of the Association Safeguarding Transmission of the Jewish Heritage of Libya, Imam Yahya Pallavicini, of the European Council of Muslim Leaders for the inter religious dialogue, animated a fraternal discussion. Representatives of different religions met on the common ground of compassionate help to others.

Delegates who share the visions of European Buddhist Chaplaincy and who are keen to contribute to its development over the next few years joyously attend the conference and the workshop in presence and online.

We reflected on the unique opportunities and challenges within the European context and explored: the practice of Buddhist spiritual care in different public settings (hospital, hospice, prison), the European approach to Buddhist chaplaincy, the training needs and pathways to becoming a Buddhist chaplain, the various training models offered in the United States, the insights from chaplains of other denominations.

In addition, the conference tried to identify the spiritual and pastoral needs within Buddhist communities

to encourage broader community cohesion and social integration.

On this occasion the new EBU training course for Buddhist chaplains has been officially presented. Produced by EBU Chaplaincy Steering Group formed by Rev. Dario Doshin Girolami (Chair and founder), Kirsten DeLeo and Keith Munnings, this proposal has emerged from discussion within EBU in the need for clearer entry pathways into and career pathways through Chaplaincy. The wish is for a more widely recognised and accepted form of qualification. The aspiration is for a training pathway to be applicable to different public sectors and useable across Europe.

Integrating Buddhist teachings and practices, this training will equip Buddhist practitioners with basic skills of chaplaincy/spiritual care.

Students will learn about the different fields of buddhist chaplaincy and spiritual care, the basic knowledge and essential skills needed to serve in prison, healthcare or hospice/palliative care chaplaincy as well as sangha care within our own communities, the practical foundation in Buddhist-based forms of spiritual care.

We currently envision it as an introductory training. It may not meet all the requirements needed for professional certification in the different countries. It may help some students to fulfil the requirements of their sangha to be endorsed or ordained as a chaplain.

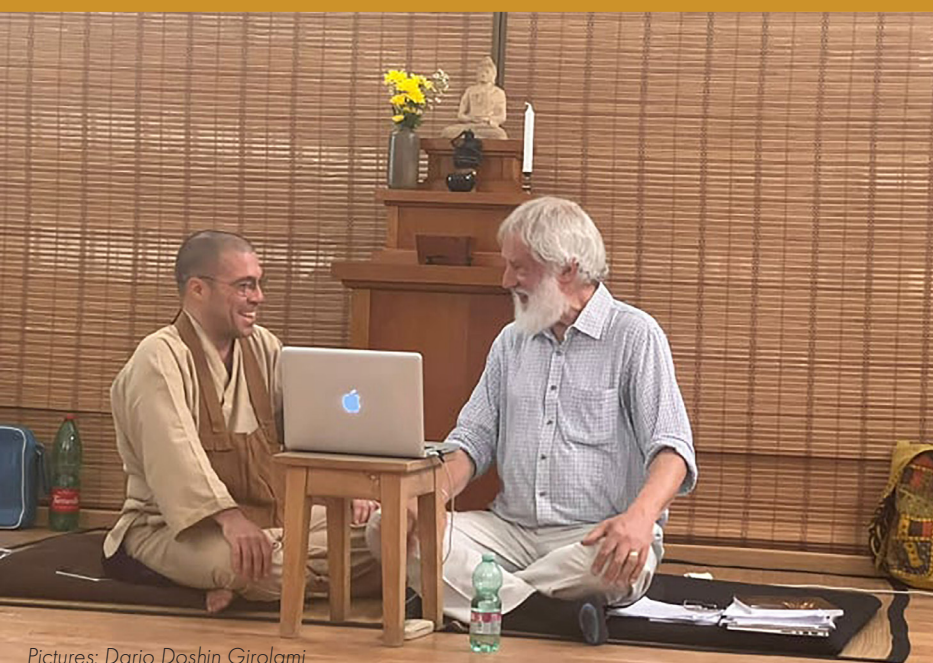
The course – endorsed by the Dharma Gate Buddhist University - will comprise four modules with a total of 144 hours of learning. The entire training may take between 18 – 24 months and, on its completion, will provide through the University a “Adult learning program” certificate.

The word “Chaplain” goes back to St Martin of Tours. While Martin was a soldier in the Roman army and stationed in Gaul (modern-day France), one day he met a scantily clad beggar. He impulsively cut his military cloak in half to share with the man. Suddenly the sky cleared and the sun began to warm like summer. When Martin woke up the day after, he found his cloak restored to wholeness.

The part kept by himself (in Latin *Cappa Sancti Martini*) became the famous relic preserved in the oratory of the Merovingian kings of the Franks. The Christian priest who cared for the cloak in its reliquary was called a *Cappellanus*, and ultimately all priests who served the military were called *cappellani*. The French translation is chapelains, from which the English word chaplain is derived.

So it was highly symbolic to hold the first conference on European Buddhist chaplaincy right in the middle of Rome, the center of Christianity.

As St. Martin’s action changed the climate, may the Buddhist chaplaincy turns the chill of old age, sickness and death into the warmth of compassion. 🧘



Dharma practice through children's books



By Sara Manzi

Being a fanatic bookworm and mother of a six-year-old child, I love to collect and read children's books. Reading aloud to and with my daughter Luna at bedtime is one of the best moments of the day. Books are powerful tools to expand children's imagination, develop a critical mind, and learn about fantastic creatures, unexplored worlds, and different visions of life. According to research, reading aloud has many cognitive benefits, such as improving attention, active listening, and problem-solving skills. In addition, stories and poems help boost children's language development by expanding their vocabulary and strengthening their literacy skills. Especially for a multilingual family (like ours), reading is crucial to maintaining home languages at the same level and creating strong family and cultural bonds. As the neuroscientist Maryanne Wolf highlights, how and what we think is largely the

result of intuitions and associations connected with our readings. Reading changes the brain at both physiological levels, creating new neuronal connections, and intellectually, exposing the reader to a myriad of experiences, realities, and ways of acting in the world. Besides cognitive and neurological advantages, the quality time spent reading together builds a deeper connection with your child, nourishes enjoyment and relaxation, and cultivates a lifelong love of books.

In Western countries, it is not very common to find a sangha or a dharma teacher who provides support or resources to families willing to share the Dharma content and practice with their children, and that is the reason why I consider children's books an educative and interactive means to get acquainted with some basic Buddhist norms and values.

Generally, I am very interested in picture books that address diverse

spiritual, faith, and philosophical themes because they enrich children's knowledge and promote mutual understanding, critical thinking, and respect for others' beliefs or attitudes toward life. Becoming aware and open to different worldview options and choosing what works best is far more important in our family than following a single path, as Buddhism suggests.

Books can serve as a Dharma compass in introducing some fundamental Buddhist teachings, but although children's literature nowadays offers many meaningful books, making the right choice could be tricky and overwhelming. In addition, as Nikko Odiseos, former president of Shambala Publications, stresses in an article¹, 'while there are a lot of great books with Buddhist-ish lessons or morals, the options for Buddhist parents who want to really help their kids understand and learn dharma in-depth are quite weak.'

1. <https://www.shambhala.com/buddhist-publishing/>

I personally also think that there are a lot of subjects that have not been explored enough or at all within the Buddhist community. Controversial or contemporary topics such as cyberbullying, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, violence and war, environmental issues, and human rights deserve to be questioned through a Buddhist lens and become accessible to young readers.

Stories generate a safe space where children can explore emotions and learn how to deal with them. Recognising emotions and needs and learning how to express them respectfully and inclusively is one of the recurrent subjects in our reading. In the last decade, the educational method of social-emotional learning (SEL) has produced a ton of books that aim to foster social and emotional skills. The Center for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics (CCSCBE) at Emory University has further expanded the SEL in Emotional and Ethical Learning (SEE), an innovative K–12 education programme that focuses on the emotional, social, and ethical sides of well-being.

Besides that, children's books about mindfulness teem on the bookshop's shelves. Breathing lessons illustrated or told by story characters are a good addition or substitute for formal meditation practice.

In the last decade, children's literature about Buddhism has been growing fast. Next to the most notorious Buddhist publishers such as Wisdom, Bala Kids, Parallax

Press, Windhorse, Maitreya, Dharma, and Tharpa, there are lots of publishers, foundations, or independent writers who do not strictly belong to a Buddhist tradition, and their books aren't always translated into English. I believe this rich, multilingual, and multicultural publishing panorama deserves to be promoted. Soon on the Dharma Parenting blog (<https://dharmaparenting.wordpress.com/>), we will start publishing a monthly children's book review based on personal experience and hopefully integrated with some author or publishing interviews. Although many books are not yet available

in English, they might be a good source of inspiration.

In this article, I will present a couple of books Luna and I have been reading recently and our personal experiences.

Happiness Doesn't Come from Headstands, by Tamara Levitt, a Canadian author and illustrator and the narrator of the Calm app.

Luna likes to do yoga. When she is in the mood, she unrolls the yoga mat and tries to imitate the animals' poses illustrated in *My First Yoga ABC* (by the author Teresa Anne Power and illustrator Kathleen Rietz), a Christmas gift from her aunt. But there is a pose



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Picture:
Sara Manzi

she still finds difficult to hold: the swan (generally called cobra pose, where the soles of the feet touch the back of the head). When I encountered Tamara's book, I was sure Luna would relate to the experience of failure and resilience of the main character. Leela can do all sorts of poses, but there is one pose she cannot do: headstands. In the story, she learns to accept her limitations and become aware of her strengths. The main message of the book, as the back cover cites, is that 'sometimes trying- and failing- can be a path to happiness, too'. Why did I add this book to the shelf of Buddhist children's literature? First, I like how the concept of happiness has been depicted as an impermanent and multifaceted element in our lives that is not necessarily linked to external goals. Secondly, how compassion and sympathetic joy arise through

the characters' dialogue. After we read the book, Luna made a couple of drawings. The first one is about what she thinks the message of the story is, and she chose to portray herself helping me do the headstands (I am not very good at that anymore, in fact!). In other words, happiness means helping a friend (or her mother in this case) learn something, as the best friend of Leela did exactly in the story. In the second one, she drew what she is good at or enjoys doing at home or school. A good exercise to stimulate her self-reflection and self-compassion. We concluded together that the swan pose and everything else she is not able to do yet are just tiny, difficult steps compared to what she has been learning so far and certainly do not define who she is because we (adults included) keep learning, failing, growing, and changing over time.

Take a breath... (Dutch version: *Adem in....*) by Sujean Rim. Born and raised in Brooklyn to South Korean parents, is an award-winning illustrator and children's book writer.

Bob is a baby bird who tries to learn to fly. Fear, anxiety, and concern take over and discourage him. When his friend Crow tells him, "All you need to do is breathe, Bob", he first does not understand that breathing instead means B-R-E-A-T-H-I-N-G. Thanks to a mindfulness lesson, he learns to believe in himself and persist despite adversity.

Luna found Bob very cute and vulnerable, but at the same time courageous. For her, the red colour of his feathers symbolises strength 'and not anger as in *The Colour Monster*' (the book of Anna Llenas), she pointed out. The message in the book is



Picture: Sara Manzi



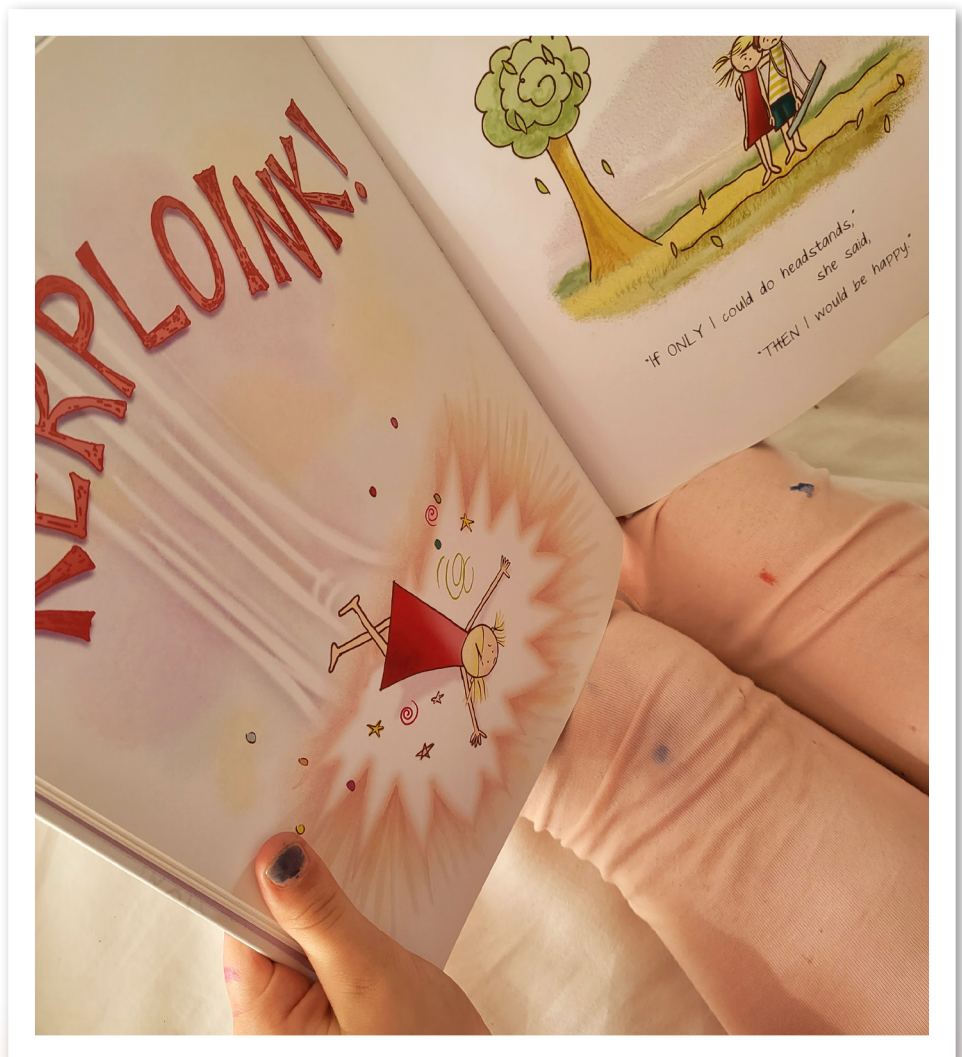
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straightforward and practical: mindfulness is a magic process to get focused and confident enough to dare learn something new. The story has been a good opportunity to practice mindfulness together and create a small paper bird for the fridge as a reminder of how helpful breathing can be when we try to fly in new and challenging life adventures.

In conclusion, children's literature is a supportive instrument for sharing, reflecting, and learning about life matters and inner realms. A powerful companion in our daily Dharma practice both as individuals and as parents who try their best to raise their children to become compassionate, resilient, and grounded human beings. Reading aloud to my child and getting to know so many illuminating and suggestive stories has been taking me on a meaningful path of self-discovery as well as reconnection with the spontaneous, playful, and

imaginative side childhood embodies. As *The Tao of Pooh* (by Benjamin Hoff) reminds us, "When you discard arrogance, complexity, and a few other things

that get in the way, sooner or later you will discover that simple, childlike, and mysterious secret known to those of the Uncarved Block: Life is Fun." 🧘



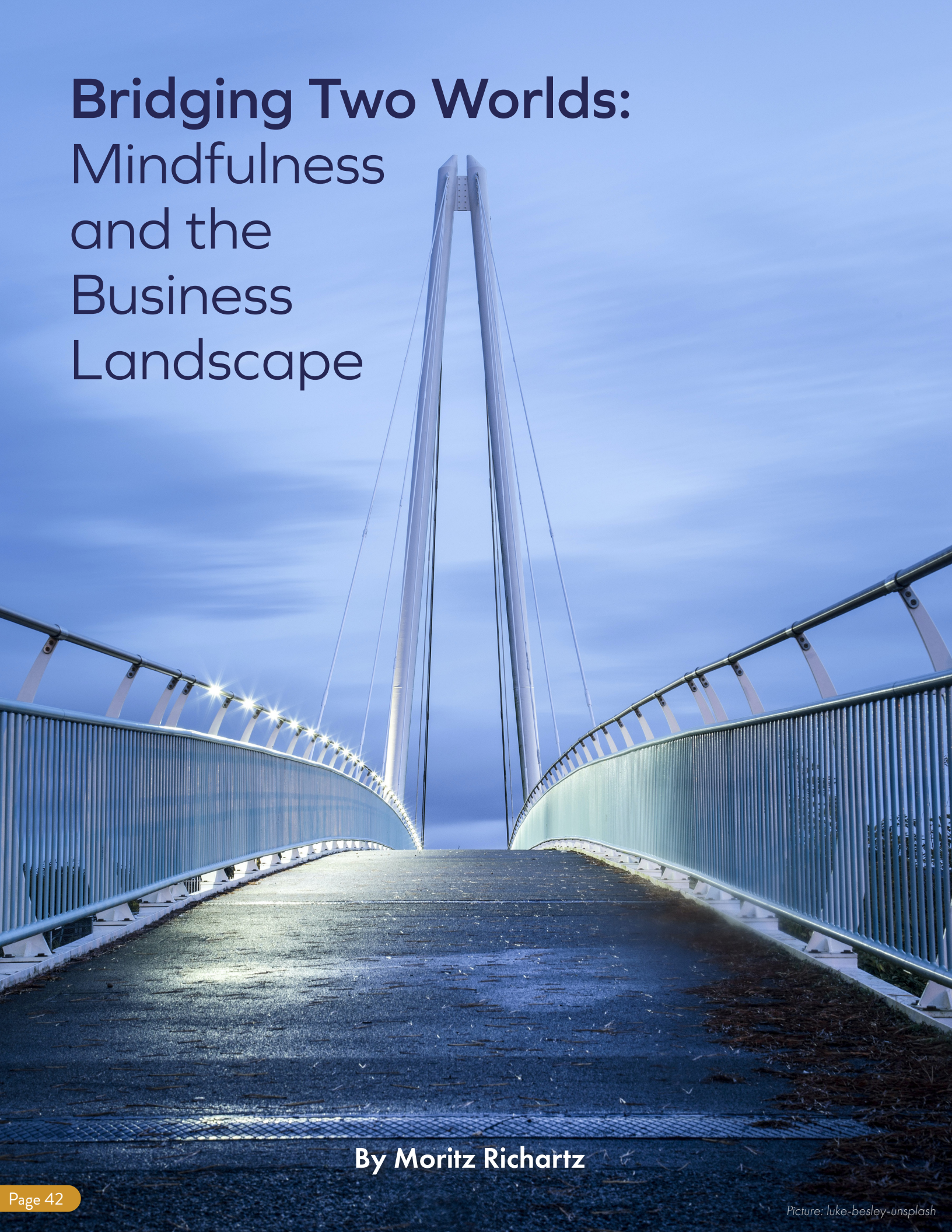
Picture: Sara Manzi

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- Teresa Power: <https://www.abcyogaforkids.com/>
- The PEACH project (Preserving and promoting Europe's cultural and linguistic heritage through empowerment of bilingual children and families) provides free tips and resources for multilingual families: <https://bilingualfamily.eu/>
- An educative video about "Reading aloud with multilingual children" made by the YouTube channel Activities for Multilingual Families: <https://youtu.be/1xaoMsXV1m8>
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Bridging Two Worlds: Mindfulness and the Business Landscape



By Moritz Richartz



'Skillful Means'
teaches us to
work not just
smarter but
also with more
compassion and
understanding,
enriching both
our personal and
professional lives.

In 2011, as a business consultant in bustling Shanghai, I embarked on a trip that would change the course of my life. A journey to Tibet opened my eyes to the serenity and wisdom of Buddhist practices, specifically meditation and mindfulness. Amidst the breathtaking Himalayas, I found something I didn't even realize I was looking for: inner peace and a different understanding of success.

Returning to Germany, armed with newfound enthusiasm and insights, I felt a compelling urge to integrate mindfulness practices into the corporate world. The initial efforts were met with resistance—after all, how could 'Eastern mysticism' benefit the German commitment to precision and productivity? But the passion I felt for the subject was unyielding, and so I began my crusade to unite my background in management with Buddhist philosophy and mindfulness practices.

Fast-forward to today, I've found a fulfilling career path that brings mindfulness techniques to the workplace, particularly focusing

on sales teams these days. My work resonates even more in these turbulent times where resilience has become a key element of personal and professional well-being. Companies are waking up to the fact that mindfulness isn't merely a trendy buzzword; it's an essential skill that complements and enhances traditional business acumen.

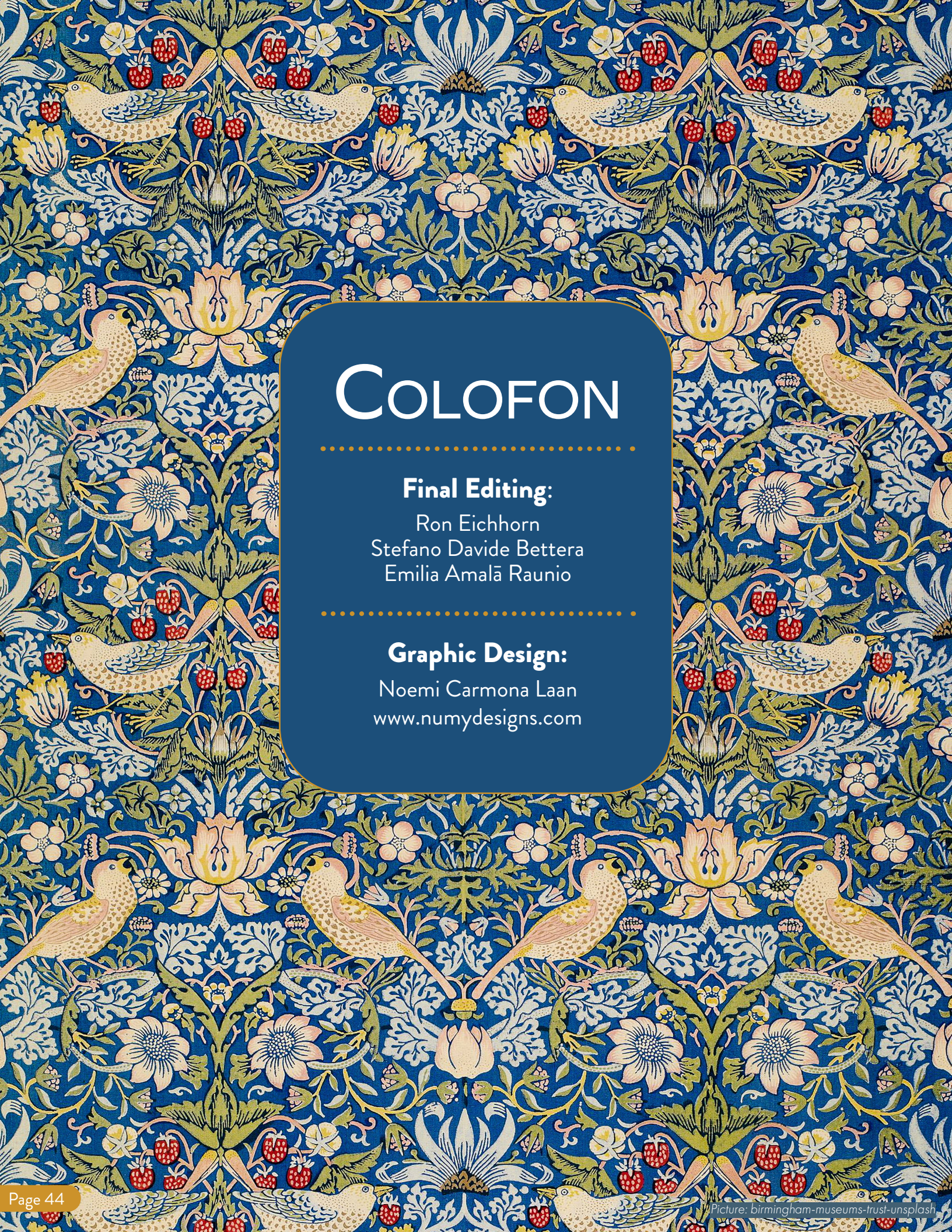
The tides have turned since those early days of skepticism. Also as a member of the "Network for Mindful Business" for some years now, I have observed a significant shift. Mindfulness and even a basic understanding of Buddhism have become more mainstream, partly accelerated by the widespread popularity of yoga and well-being movements.

The certification I received from a reputable company that specializes in mindfulness practices in the business world, adds a layer of credibility that wasn't easily available a decade ago. Through workshops, seminars, and one-on-one coaching sessions, I combine empirical methods and ancient

wisdom to help teams cultivate resilience, reduce stress, and ultimately improve performance.

One resource that deeply influences my approach is the concept of 'Skillful Means' from the Tibetan Nyingma tradition. This idea helps bridge the gap between the business world's demand for actionable results and Buddhism's more introspective goals. 'Skillful Means' teaches us to work not just smarter but also with more compassion and understanding, enriching both our personal and professional lives.

In a world more connected yet paradoxically more isolated than ever, the message of mindfulness and resilience is critical. It's heartening to see the growing acceptance of this synthesis of Buddhism and business. After all, in an era where everyone is searching for a competitive edge, perhaps what we need most is to pause, breathe, and be present—something I learned not in a boardroom, but on a meditative journey in the highlands of Tibet. 🧘



COLOFON

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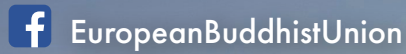
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The EBU was founded in 1975 in London and is a member of the European Council of Religious Leaders and Religions for Peace.

In 2008 the EBU obtained official participatory status with the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations at the Council of Europe.



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