

# Buddha's Café

By Nadine Levy

Every fortnight a vibrant group of young adults meets at Buddha House in Adelaide, South Australia. Each meeting grapples with a different aspect of Australian youth culture and provides an opportunity to debate and experience the theme through the lens of Buddhist philosophy. The purpose is to provide a comfortable, open and safe setting for young people to express themselves, socialize and practice active Dharma.

Most members have taken an interest in Buddhism through reading books and surfing the web and they are new to the idea of a sangha or Dharma center. Others are Buddha House regulars, looking to meet like-minded individuals. And, of course, friends have brought friends, and our little group has slowly grown to encompass a variety of young people with diverse cultural, religious and educational backgrounds.

It has been so moving to witness how accepting and patient the members of Buddha's Café are towards one another. Often with little or no formal understanding of Buddhist teachings, these young people freely practice the virtues of compassion and generosity without batting an eyelid.

Our diversity has hardly caused barriers. On the contrary, it has been cause for curiosity, understanding and celebration. All members kindly listen to each other's views with an open heart – never interrupting or expressing frustration at another's opinion. When views diverge, there is an attempt to genuinely understand and empathize. That's not to say that members do not enjoy a lively exchange of ideas from time to time. The group is quickly learning that debating that is underpinned by love and respect can lead to deeper understandings of the Buddha's teachings. We have found that there is a lot to be learned by observing how we relate to each other in a social setting.

After each gathering, I muse that our world leaders could learn a little something about kindness and generosity from our group's interactions.



**Back row: Matthew, Matthew, Todd, Sam, Scott.  
Middle row: Victor, Stephanie, Emeera. Kneeling: Nadine,  
Melissa, Emma.**

The gathering has offered a variety of activities and themes, including storytelling and performance, book-sharing and “popcorn and movie” nights. As the group has evolved, we have appreciated the importance of balancing intellectual discussions with creative activities. Examples of such activities include the performance of Zen stories, meditation, drawing exercises and musical chanting. This group is unlike anything our goma has ever seen. It is a symposium of many ideas and is unlike the

formal lectures we are so used to.

Unlike the stereotypical “individualist” and “consumerist” view of young people, the members of Buddha's Café take a sincere interest in issues of social justice, peace and active compassion. Many are keen to get involved in the struggle to free Tibet and Burma, and others are excited about organising events that enable spontaneous acts of generosity. At present, our group is organizing an afternoon to free some bait-worms in a friend's garden.

This group is proof that young people want to get active in their community. They seek to alleviate others' suffering, regardless of whether or not they call themselves a Buddhist. Sadly, our Western world does not provide many outlets for young people to engage in collective spiritual altruism. There seems to be a lack of social groups for young people that encourage both inner and outer compassion. Buddha's Café seeks to provide a space that facilitates and supports free-thinking and the expression of aspirations and hopes.

Some have the tendency to label today's young people as self-seeking and selfish rather preemptively and without offering young people the opportunity to express their own peace and inner-wisdom. We need to have faith in the youth of today – faith that the world is in safe hands, that many young people care and wish to work towards a wiser and healthier community. ☸