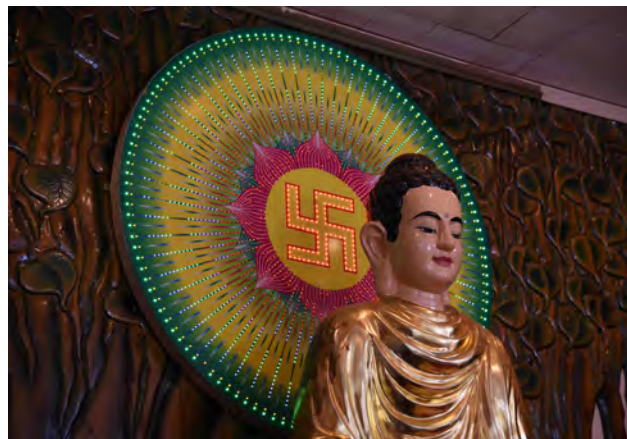


The Buddha and the Swastika - New Law

The Victorian government has banned the public display of Nazi symbols. In European countries the swastika or, in German, the Hakenkreuz (hooked cross), is mostly known for its associations with the Second World War and Nazism. More recently it has been used by neo-Nazis. Where the swastika is used to promote racism and hate, it has been banned, but where it is used in its



traditional Buddhist, Hindu or Jain context, there is no ban.

Representatives from the Buddhist Council of Victoria and other community groups negotiated this outcome after more than a year of consultation. The traditional meaning of the swastika is good fortune, virtue and auspiciousness and it is a common design feature in iconography, textiles and architecture. (Continued p.2)

Contact:

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**Newsletter editor and photographer-
Dr Diana Cousens,
Vice Chair BCV.**

This newsletter is supported by the Victorian Government through the Swastika Education and Awareness Program.

Our New Committee

At the AGM in October, 2022, a new BCV committee was elected. The picture below includes current committee members and attendees at the AGM.



BCV Committee 2023

President, Mr Dinesh Weerakkody, Sakyamuni Sambuddha Vihara; Vice-President, Dr Diana Cousens, Siddhartha's Intent Melbourne; Secretary, Mr Daniel Byron, Dudjom Tersar Practitioners Melbourne; Treasurer, Mr Kishantha Elleperumaarachchi, Dhamma Sarana Vihara; Ordinary Members - Ven. Thich Phuoc Tan, Quang Minh Temple; Ven. Dr Piyasilo Bhikkhu, Buddhist Society of Australia; Ven. Chi Kwang Sunim, Soen Centre; H.E. Zimwock Tulku, Nalandra Australia; Mr Kushan Abeyakoon, Young Buddhist Research and Cultural Centre.

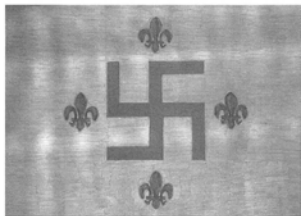
Milestones

Thanks to outgoing BCV Secretary, Michael Wells of the Buddhist Society of Victoria, for over ten years of outstanding volunteer work. Thanks also to retiring prison chaplain, Libby Mowlam, who also served for more than ten years. Although living in NSW she used to visit Langi Kal Kal, Hopkins, Loddon, Middleton, Dhurringile, and Beechworth prisons, a journey that would take her days to complete.

The Buddha and the Swastika - New Law



The flag flown in Beulah is in the form known as the 'Hakenkreuz' and public display is banned, except for educational, scientific, academic or artistic purposes. Source: Wikipedia.



Flag for the Order of the New Templars, 1907.



Cover page of the Secret of the Runes, 1908.

Source: Nakagaki, T., The Buddhist Swastika and Hitler's Cross, Stone Bridge Press, 2018.

The Origins of the Ban

Diana Cousens

In recent times there has been an increase in the use of the swastika to promote neo-Nazism. When the Nazi Symbol Prohibition Bill was read for a second time in the Victorian Parliament in May, 2022, four incidents were noted which had the intention of conveying messages of hate and intimidation. One of these was the flying of a flag over a house in Beulah. This particular flag was in use between 1935 and 1938 and is the German Command Flag for the Minister of War and is pictured at left. In this form the swastika should be referred to as the 'Hakenkreuz' because it is being used to promote Nazism or neo-Nazism.

The Bill came about after the government undertook consultation with community groups including the Buddhist Council of Victoria, the Hindu Council of Australia and the Jewish Community Council. The goal was to work out a ban which would protect the Jewish community but not be prejudicial to those communities for whom the swastika was a normal part of religious iconography. The new law, which came into effect in December 2022, makes it a criminal offence to intentionally display the Nazi Hakenkreuz symbol if:

- you know, or ought to reasonably know, that the symbol is a symbol of Nazi ideology
- you display the symbol in a public place or in public view
- your display does not fall within one of several exceptions under the new law.

A person who is found guilty of the offence could face a fine of up to approximately \$22,000 or 120 penalty units, up to 12 months' imprisonment, or both.

The Second World War

The Second World War (WW2) had two fronts, in Asia and Europe. In Asia it began with the Japanese occupation of China in the 1930s. In Europe it began with the German invasion of Poland in 1939. In the 1930s Germany fell under the control of the Nazi Party. This was a particularly vicious organisation that promoted racism and hatred of Jewish people (anti-Semitism). Nazi-controlled Germany invaded surrounding countries such as France, Belgium, the USSR and, as mentioned, Poland. These countries fought back and allied countries such as Australia, the UK, and the USA came to their defence. A predominant part of the Nazi plan was the extermination of the Jewish people and six million Jews were systematically murdered in concentration camps, plus many gypsies, communists and homosexuals. This mass murder is known as the Holocaust. Unfortunately the Nazis, led by Adolf Hitler, adopted a particular form of the swastika as their insignia. Consequently for a large part of the world the swastika, which was known in German as the Hakenkreuz, or 'hooked cross', is identified with Nazism. The Second World War ended in both Europe and Asia in 1945.

Where Does the Swastika Come From?

The swastika is an ancient symbol found across the world in North, Central and South America, Europe, Scandinavia, Israel, Africa, India, Central Asia and China. It has been used in world religions including Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism and Bon, the indigenous religion of Tibet. In Buddhism and Hinduism it symbolises goodness and auspiciousness.

See Media Links

<https://www.jwire.com.au/from-next-week-jail-fines-await-neo-nazis-in-victoria/>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uC3gjUU77sM&ab_channel=ABCNews%28Australia%29

Why Did the Nazis Adopt the Swastika?

European trade relations with India were established in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and trade relations with Central Asia are much older. Travellers and traders observed that languages such as Persian and Sanskrit shared both structure and common words with European languages such as English, German, French and Italian. It was theorised that all these languages were descended from an original 'Proto Indo European language'. It was imagined that the early speakers of this language formed an original ancestor race known as the Aryans. In the nineteenth century German nationalists fancied themselves as descendants of these original Aryans and sought to create a country characterised by 'racial purity'. This meant institutionalising hatred of foreigners, especially Jewish people, who were subject to appalling discrimination, culminating in the Holocaust. The swastika was identified as an ancient symbol that had been found at Troy and was therefore a part of ancient Greece. The swastika was also a common symbol in India where the idea of an Aryan invasion of light skinned people from the north who had displaced the original dark skinned people was widely held. The swastika was first converted into a symbol of a fictional original Aryan people by an Austrian former Catholic monk, Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels (1874-1954). He founded the Order of the New Templars, an esoteric organisation committed to Aryan supremacy and anti-Semitism which used the swastika on their flag in 1907. The swastika was used on the cover of an occult book entitled 'The Secret of the Runes' in 1908 by Guido von List (1848-1919) and then adopted as a part of the logo of the Thule Society in 1919. This was a racist occult organisation who helped inspire Nazism. Nazi ideology was a mishmash of strange ideas and included unscientific beliefs such as 'World Ice Theory', the belief that ice was the basic substance of the universe. It should be remembered that a century ago much basic scientific knowledge was in the process of being established or was only known to those with above average education.

Contemporary Australia

A range of right wing groups which promote racist ideologies are active in Australia. Some of these are classified as 'Neo-Nazis', being groups seeking to promote Nazi ideology such as hatred of Jewish people and white supremacy. Some of these groups have used Hitler's Hakenkreuz so as to intimidate others, particularly the Jewish community. As a result Nazi symbols are banned in Victoria. Where a swastika is used to promote racism and hatred it is considered to be a Nazi symbol and the criminal law applies, as explained above. However, where a swastika is used as a part of the cultural traditions of the Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and other communities, there is no prohibition.

Raising Awareness

The Buddhist Council of Victoria has received funding to raise awareness of the ban on Nazi symbols and the exemption for the traditional use of the swastika. Over more than a year we have worked with the Jewish Community Council of Victoria and the Hindu Council of Australia, Victorian chapter, to ensure that the new law in Victoria is fit for purpose and does not criminalise traditional religious and cultural practice. We are happy to visit your temple and provide an information session on this topic.

The first information session will be at the Quang Minh Vietnamese Buddhist temple, 18 Burke Street, Braybrook on 18 March 2023 at 3.00 p.m. Bookings not required.

Pillars of Light

The traditional Jewish celebration of Chanukah was commemorated at Federation Square in December 2022. Members of government and representatives from the Hindu, Jain and Buddhist traditions participated by lighting the Menorah candelabra. This symbolised our collaboration on the new law and our unity in working towards a harmonious society.



Joyfulness gate at Hoa Nghiem temple, Springvale. Cover photo - Buddha at Quang Minh temple, Braybrook.

See more about the Swastika Education Awareness Program at <https://bcv.org.au/swastika-education-awareness-campaign/>

Would your temple like to host an information session? Contact us - administrator @bcv.org.au





Dr Praveena Rajkopal,
Project Officer
<projectofficer@bcv.org.au>

Family Violence Support

1800 015 188

<https://www.safesteps.org.au/about-us/contact-us/>

Please sign our petition at Change.org asking the state Premier, Daniel Andrews, to ban duck shooting.

<https://chnng.it/W6snBntTVG>

We are deeply sorry to hear about the loss of the beautiful Bright Moon Buddhist temple in Springvale and hope that it will be rebuilt without delay.



New Project Officer for Healthy Relationships Project

BCV Healthy Relationships Project Officer, Dr Praveena Rajkopal

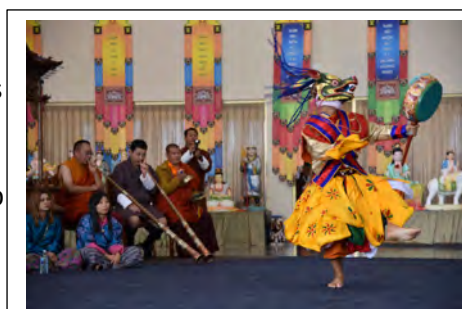
I am honored to assume the role of the project officer for BCV's 'Faith Communities Supporting Healthy Family Relationships' project this year. I have a PhD from Deakin University, as well as a background in community development and engagement, specifically working with diverse ethnic and religious communities in Sri Lanka and Australia. My doctoral thesis explored the ways in which local cultures and religions can contribute to sustainable community development.

As the project officer for this initiative, my vision is to build collective knowledge on how to effectively address issues related to family health and wellbeing within Buddhist communities in Victoria. The goal is to bridge any gaps that may exist between the spiritual and secular dimensions of understanding and addressing issues of family violence. As a practising Buddhist and a scholar who has worked with the concept of Engaged Buddhism, I see this project by the Victorian Government as an opportunity to merge the wealth of knowledge and experience possessed by secular institutions and spiritual Buddhist leaders who have mostly been working in isolation - to understand and respond to the issues of family health and wellbeing in communities holding Buddhist values.

Through initial consultations with Buddhist leaders, both monks and nuns, I have realised that this project provides a much-needed space for dialogue between secular, mainstream organisations, and spiritual, faith-based organisations. Therefore, I intend to pay a great deal of attention to organising and conducting 'meet and greet sessions' between Buddhist faith leaders and service providers to converse and share knowledge on issues related to family health and wellbeing in Buddhist communities, and the nature of services provided and available to them. These discussions will enable cultural capacity building of the mainstream organisations while also building the capacity of Buddhist leaders to respond to such issues more effectively in partnership with secular organisations. I have also initiated discussions with a couple of Buddhist temples on the possibility of conducting awareness raising workshops among Dhamma school youths on healthy family relationships and gender equity. In its work this year, this project will produce knowledge and resources that can provide better outcomes for Buddhist families who reach out to their faith leaders when navigating through their family issues.

Happy Lunar New Year

The Chinese and Vietnamese communities celebrated new year on 22 February 2023, being the Year of the Rabbit or Cat. At Quang Minh Temple in Braybrook, a group of Bhutanese dancers gave a special performance of masked dance.



Your Temple Can Apply to Join the Buddhist Council of Victoria

If your Buddhist temple would like to join the BCV then download the form at <https://bcv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Membership-Form-2022-web.pdf>
See more about membership at <https://bcv.org.au/membership/>

By participating in the BCV you will have chance to inform government policy in Victoria and Australia and have a say in what BCV focuses on in serving the Buddhist community.