

ÖSTERREICISCHE BUDDHISTISCHE RELIGIONSGESELLSCHAFT = ÖBR
AUSTRIAN BUDDHIST SOCIETY

Buddhism has been officially recognized by the Austrian government in February 1983. There had been small groups of Buddhists already for several centuries mainly in Vienna.

By being recognized the government does also give certain directions in what way the structure has to be.

We have an executive body called „Praesidium“, consisting of 1 president, 2 vice presidents and 1 general secretary.

These four are elected by the members of the ÖBR every 5 years.

Then there is the „parish“ body who are in direct care of the members, with 1 chairman and 2 vice chairmen. They are elected every 3 years also by the members of ÖBR.

This group of 7 people meets once a month to discuss all matters that occur.

4 times a year there is also a meeting called the „Sangharat“, attended by representatives of all our official traditions and groups to discuss all problems that have arisen and try to find solutions.

To help us in the other Austrian counties we have installed representatives there so that people may have a closer contact possibility. The representatives are under the direct control of the ÖBR Praesidium.

The center of our society is our office. There we have a secretary, this being the only paid job we have. Here all the daily work gets done, phone calls, information for inquiring people, all paperwork etc. It is situated since the beginning of our society in the center of Vienna and there are also meditation rooms for each of the three major Buddhist teachings.

As being an official religion we should if possible provide the teaching of Buddhism to all Buddhist children age 6 - 18, which we do in Vienna and several of our county capitals. The teachers are paid by the government and also for the program we have for further training of the teachers we get support.

Other than that we do not get any financial support from the government.

Our funding we do through our officially registered traditions and groups, 22 of them, who all have to contribute monthly to support us. We also have a quarterly where they all present themselves and their current program. For this there are fixed rates to be paid. The rest we achieve from DANA reminding everybody to support us in all our communications with our members and Buddhist interested people.

We now have about 2600 official single members and no membership fee. There are many more Buddhists living in Austria though. We estimate easily 30.000.

To become a single member the procedure is easy, you only have to fill in a form and hand it in.

To become a member as a tradition or group is a long procedure with close examinations as to their practice, lineage and credibility.

Due to our official status we are invited to all the interreligious meetings and several other official invitations. Once a year the prime minister invites all the heads of the official religions to dine with him and communicate with each other. We were invited for an interview to our president on the occasion of our 25th anniversary of recognition. Our contacts to the other religions are well observed.

In all we are on a good basis as well as with the government as with other religions.

We are present in the radio and television also.

We also have contact to the ethnic groups from Asia and try to integrate them. This is not so easy since very often their German is rather nonexistent and they are much happier in their own group. But we do succeed often due to the teaching of their children and the fact that we offer a Sunday Puja once a month which is very happily attended by many.

We have a whole number of services, from caretaking of sick and dying, to going to prisons. Whoever wants can get assistance for weddings or funerals, and there is a group monthly taking care of the mourning.

Our celebrations for everybody are Vesakh on the last Sunday in May and before X-mas we invite everybody to celebrate with our schoolchildren.

What are our struggles?

- a) our main struggles are the funds to do all the things we want to
- b) communication, just never enough of it between all of us, or lack of interest
- c) severe quarrels of the groups with others