



AUKANA

newsletter 1/2019

HOUSE OF INNER
TRANQUILLITY



“Give an enlightened being a diamond in one hand, and a kiwi fruit sliced in half in the other and he or she will look at the diamond and say, ‘How beautiful, how amazing.’ Looking at the kiwi fruit, he or she will say, ‘How amazing, how beautiful.’ This is because you see that, in reality, one is not worth more than the other. You see that the quality of emptiness is equally inherent in both.”

PAUL HARRIS

EDITORIAL

Where do you end and I begin? Individually, where exactly is that boundary that separates us from one another? What is it that identifies each of us as solid, individual and independent? As a culture, should we be aiming at integrating different outlooks and minimising distinctions? Or, instead, should we be celebrating and encouraging diversity as an expression of our uniqueness and liberty? Or both? The problem of boundaries and identity is one that affects everyone. And it is full of puzzles and contradictions.

For instance, the heart of the debate surrounding Brexit is as much to do with ideas about sovereignty and

identity as it is concerned with sound economics. To what degree should we retain our distinctive British heritage as opposed to being part of a greater federation of states? Isn't embracing cultural diversity a noticeable feature of that heritage? How much freedom of movement is prudent? Does it matter that the person behind you at the supermarket checkout is speaking another language?

Again, the cultural phenomenon of identity politics is currently sweeping the world. It operates on the principle that society is rife with systemic discrimination based on personal attributes such as sexual orientation, gender, race, economic status, and

ability. Such discrimination is viewed as creating multiple barriers to opportunity and reinforces prejudice and oppression. The aim of this new movement is to enact progressive political and social reforms that will positively promote equity and, it is hoped, dissolve all such barriers. The paradox is that this philosophy actually begins by placing everyone into strict categories. It then judges individuals relative to the perceived merit of the group into which they have been put. This, of course, is the very outlook upon which all discrimination and prejudice is based in the first place. As much as the wish may be to dissolve boundaries, the outcome is actually to reinforce them.

The Buddha said of his teaching that it runs, "against the stream" of such worldly attitudes. Freedom from suffering, he discovered, is not the dissolution of all boundaries nor the destruction of personal identity. His enlightenment was the transcendence of them. His breakthrough was seeing that the world of separate objects, ideas and divisions is illusory. They are empty of any fundamental reality. Seen from one point of view each of us is a unique individual with distinct characteristics, abilities and personal history. Seen from another point of

view, all of that is a mere conjuring of appearances due to the interplay of transient conditional forces. Seeing through the veil of mere appearances meant that the Buddha was now free from the need to identify with anything. He had realised the essential unity of existence; the absence of duality; the boundless freedom of *nibbana*. He was still able to discern the differences between things but saw through them completely. "I use the terms," the Buddha stated, "I'm not confused by them."

Those committed to following the Buddhist training need to bear this in mind. The Path is taking us on a radically different trajectory from that of cultural, philosophical, religious and political beliefs. We are seeking liberation from all ideological possession. We practise Insight meditation in order to see that clinging to identity in all its forms is born of ignorance and merely fetters us ever more tightly to the wheel of suffering. Repeated observation of the interplay of transient conditional forces that form each new conscious moment enables us to see through the veil of appearances. We too can awaken to the peace and boundless freedom of *nibbana*, transcending all division completely. ■

NEWS

Maintenance: In the last Newsletter we reported that replacing the roof of 10 Masons Lane had finally begun. After the scaffolding had been erected on the garden side, the Wisteria that surrounds the Shrine Room windows wasted no time in using it as a climbing frame. It quickly twined up the poles and up through gaps in the planks on the top gangway. Pigeons found a favourite new perch on the poles, while the jackdaws watched proceedings from the Eucalyptus tree in the vain hope that they might nest again under the eaves.

Roofers **Nigel Tripp**, his son **Robbie** and colleague **Dan** were joined by **Brent Murden** to begin work on the garden side of the building. Meanwhile, the scaffolders constructed a framework along the road in accordance with the plan agreed with the council. Unfortunately, as the scaffold was being erected, it quickly became apparent that the original plan was unworkable. There was so much traffic disruption and confusion that irate drivers called the council to complain. The chaos was extreme enough to make local headline news. Despite the trying circumstances, however, the scaffolders remained calm. Clearly experienced in such matters, they were professional and

courteous in dealing with all the people affected. A member of the council arrived promptly to review the situation and decided that lights to control the traffic flow were necessary after all. The scaffolders arranged hire of traffic lights for four weeks. Although it was very short-notice, they were able to create the necessary accounts and exchange documents with the hire company and the lights were in place by the 5 o'clock deadline imposed by the council. The scaffolders also created a pedestrian walkway and thoughtfully included a ramp so that buggies and wheelchairs could be manoeuvred easily.

Having the scaffolding on the road side of no. 10 meant that we could paint the second floor window sills and frames. **Brother Nigel** painted these and also the north-facing dormer windows. The dormer windows on the south and west sides of the roof were painted by **Anda Lutkevics** and day students **Scott Harris** and **Dave Gilbert**. The east-facing dormer window was painted by Brother Nigel after the roof was completed and the scaffolding removed as it is accessible from the flat roof below. The wooden fire escape gangway situated outside this window had to be moved out of the way to access the roof for repairs.

We discovered it had partially rotted underneath so it was repaired and treated with wood preserver by Dave Gilbert before repositioning.

The roofers continued their work at the front of the building. They removed the old tiles, replaced batons and added insulation and felting to the roof before replacing the tiles. They completed the roof by fixing the ridge tiles on the top with concrete. The hips that run from the ridge to the bottom corners of the roof took some time to line up straight due to movement of the building and roof over many years. These tiles too were concreted securely in place. Wire netting was stapled to the underside of the roof ensuring good ventilation but prohibiting access by birds and vermin into the eaves and roof space. New guttering around the roof will hopefully lead to fewer blockages from fallen leaves. After the finishing touches to the roof had been made, Brother Nigel deftly used ladders and scaffolding to remove the rope-like twines of Wisteria from the smothered scaffold poles.

We would like to thank Nigel Tripp and his team of roofers, and to everyone at Melksham Scaffolding, for their hard work and consideration, and for doing such a great job. We are greatly

appreciative too of the generosity of many people over many years, which has meant that the necessary funds have been available to pay for this vital work to be carried out.



Roofers Robbie Tripp, Brent Murden and Nigel Tripp

Replacing the roof proved to be a dusty business but meditators **Julia Barton, Olivia Rowlatt, and Kris Bessant** were on hand to wash down the walls and ceilings on the top floor of no. 10 and Anda cleaned the rest. Brother Nigel repainted some walls on the top floor that had been stained by rain water seeping through the

roof. He also painted round the newly fitted roof windows after Brent Murden had plastered their surrounds. The top floor was then in a fit state for **Sister Sara** and Anda to move back into from the lower floor rooms that they occupied during the work. Now that the winter is upon us the new insulation has been put to the test and the top floor rooms have proven to be substantially cosier than in the past.

Garden: A rotten part of the fence between no. 9 and no. 8 gardens is being rebuilt. In December the shrubs in the no. 9 border were cut back and the fence behind cleared of ivy. Unfortunately, when the ivy was pulled off, rotten bits of fence came with it. Brother Nigel and Dave Gilbert cleared it all away and fitted new upright posts using an instant setting concrete mix. Brother Nigel is swiftly reconstructing the fence during the available daylight hours. The structure is similar to the one in the Japanese garden and will be treated with wood preserver when complete.

Online: Meditators **Sally Passfield** and **Marc Cooper** will be helping Paul and Sister Sara to create and maintain a co-ordinated social media strategy. This will include regular

postings about the Centre, the books, audio and video links, long reads and inspiring quotes that can be uploaded simultaneously across multiple online platforms.

In the meantime, we are continuing to upload audio and video teaching. Recently we passed the eight thousand mark for listens to the Aukana lectures. Paul has also begun a new series of videos about *paticca-samuppada* posted to our YouTube channel. Unlike the previous videos, Paul decided to speak directly to camera and to use visual aids that can be downloaded. This is intended to give the videos a more personal and interactive feel. If you would like to support the videos, it is very easy to create a YouTube account and subscribe to the channel. This means you will receive notification when each video is uploaded and will be able to post comments and questions that Paul can respond to in subsequent videos. The channel can be accessed via the link on the footer of the Aukana website.

Workshop and Classes: We will be offering only one Saturday workshop in the spring. This is to save Paul enough energy for another series of Monday evening Pali Canon classes

as well. The autumn workshop was very well attended and, happily, a couple of the people who came along have now become members of the group. Details of the next workshop are on the Diary page of this newsletter and will be posted on the website.

The autumn Pali Canon Classes were very enjoyable but also quite demanding. Paul once again chose suttas from the first volume of Middle Length Sayings, ending with three classes taken up with the Discourse on the Parable of the Water Snake. (Sutta no. 22) More classes are booked for the spring.

Satellite groups: Sadly, during the autumn, **Jim Vuylsteke's** mother died. We would like to extend our heartfelt condolences to Jim, a long-standing friend of the Centre. This came at a time when he was busy organising a house move. What with the Toronto group members also away periodically, this meant that there was no opportunity to meet up. Jim is due to move into new property where he will be able to hold meetings, so things look promising for the future.

Dan Curtis who runs the Victoria, Canada group reports that his group of 8 members meets weekly and did a weekend silent retreat in November.

The group completed their study of The Maha Mangala Sutta. Further studies are on Equanimity and Metta according to Ajahn Sona.

Open Day: This year the biennial event will be taking place on Sunday 23rd June. This is a chance for meditators to invite family and friends to visit the Centre and have a look around the houses and gardens. They can also meet Paul and the full-time community as well as fellow meditators and supporters. It is a cheery and sociable event and the Centre's peaceful atmosphere always seems to leave guests with a favourable impression.

It is an opportunity for members of the group to practise generosity and service. On the day itself, we will need lots of volunteers to run the shop, the tea-stall and to help look after visitors. Traditionally, meditators donate cakes (home-made or bought) for the tea-stall. The green-fingered are very welcome to propagate and donate plants for the garden-stall.

There is also a great deal of work in preparing for the day, particularly in the week or two just prior. We will be asking for volunteers nearer the time. Please do let us know if you can come in to help of an afternoon. ■

BRADFORD ON AVON

HOUSE OF INNER TRANQUILLITY

RETREATS

6-Day Integrated Retreats

February 11-16

March 25-30

May 27-June 1

6-Day Silent Retreats

February 18-23

March 11-16

April 1-6

April 29-May 4

June 3-8

Weekend Retreats

March 1-3

April 12-14

May 10-12

TAPE & LECTURE EVENINGS

Note: The evenings start at 7.30pm, the door will be open from 7.15pm.

February 6	Lecture
February 13	Tape
February 20	Q&A
February 27	Tape
March 6	Lecture
March 13	Tape
March 20	Q&A
March 27	Tape
April 3	Lecture
April 10	Tape
April 17	Q&A
April 24	Tape
May 1	Lecture
May 8	Tape
May 15	Q&A
May 22	Tape
May 29	Lecture
June 5	Tape
June 12	Q&A

OPEN MEDITATIONS

Saturday mornings 10.15-11.15. The door will be open from 10.05am, February 9 - June 8 inc.

SATURDAY WORKSHOP

10am to 3pm

March 9

CLASSES

MONDAY EVENINGS

7.30 to 9.45pm

Pali Canon

April 29, May 6, 13, 20, 27

WESAK

Saturday May 18

Evening starts 7.30pm

Doors open from 7.15pm

OPEN DAY

On Sunday 23 June, the Centre, Monasteries and gardens will be open between 2 and 6pm. All readers of this newsletter, their families and friends are welcome to attend.

SATELLITE GROUPS

Activities: Please contact

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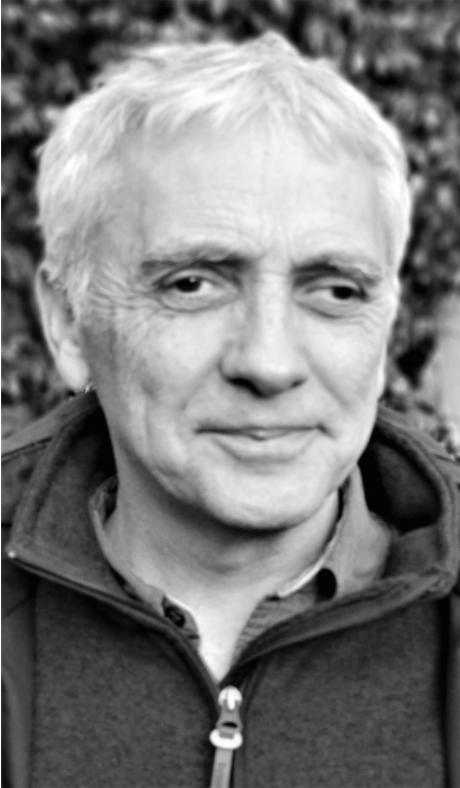
Victoria Canada: Dan Curtis

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Other Voices: Steve Marsden



Q: Are you pleased to be back at the Centre after the break?

Steve: Yes. I find the break quite difficult, really. When I am not coming to the Centre, I can quite easily get side-tracked. Thinking I am doing it well, or thinking I am getting some-

where, “Ah, this is finally it. It’s all snapped into place. Now all I need to do is repeat it.” And that is a complete illusion, isn’t it? I get into more and more craving for results. Coming back to the Centre helps ground me. It makes the practice more even. The lecture evenings, the Q&As and the tapes give you the information and they remind you of the teaching. But it is the sitting in the meditation, I think, that plays a really important part. It makes me more equanimous and helps get rid of those tendencies to try too hard or go off into a “puddle of bliss” as Paul calls it. Sitting with all the people in meditation together and particularly the full-time community, seems to get you back into the right way of meditating. It sounds a bit “cosmic” but it is as if you have got a group-mind and some kind of psychic empathy happens. You pick up the experience of how it is to meditate.

In the breaks you can get caught up in things to do with work, or things to do with relationships, family relationships and so forth. Coming to the Centre keeps me on an even keel, you could say, but it is more than that. It gives you a much greater insight into

yourself, your patterns and habits, as well as things that come up in other people that previously you would have responded to negatively. Birgit (who also attends the Centre) and I are in a relationship, we have been in for a long time and we went through years of arguing. Just years and years of it. The same old arguments, the same old issues coming up over and over again. Let's have another go at this issue and another tussle from a different angle. These patterns can take over your life and go on for decades, in some cases. To a large extent that has all gone now.

Q: What do you put that down to?

Steve: Not holding on to views, more compassion and loving-kindness, less of a need to get our own way and prove ourselves. Generally, it is just much more harmonious and easy-going.

Q: What prompted you to start coming in as a day student again?

Steve: Getting to be sixty-four and thinking, "I better get on with this." (laughter) Again, greater clarity and more opportunity to practise. That is what I feel I need. Not just practice in meditation, but being with people and keeping right mindfulness go-

ing, practising right speech during interactions and during work here at the Centre. It is easier to practise here, but also it is the bigger reminder. It is why you are here on this planet. Why you are in this life. To do these things, not to be just out there making money, just being part of normal society. There is a bigger picture, a true purpose for being here. A reason for your life and what it is about in terms of actions, thoughts, deeds.

I would recommend highly people getting on with it quickly. Do it now. It is a great joy and a great privilege to be here and to be able to be with everyone else who is here, either as a full-time student or as a day student, working together. It is a completely different relationship from what you get in the outside world. There is no game-playing, you are here with a great deal of honesty and integrity. It is all about distractions out there, rushing after this, that and the other, and having the delusion that you can find happiness and what you want in all those things outside. The renunciation of those pursuits calms the mind down, calms the whole body and mind. You get more focus on just noting things, rather than rushing about trying to grasp after everything. ■

Extract from a Dhamma Talk with full-time students

Question: Some people try to protect others from experiencing painful feelings. Why does someone do this and what are the consequences?

Paul: Why would somebody do this?

Student 1: I think a lot of people have a perception that painful feelings are always bad and that you should never experience them. So, they try to make sure that the people around them do not, if it is at all within their ability.

Paul: Yes. This idea is becoming more widespread. A new generation, it seems, have been brought up being coddled and kept away from disagreeable experiences, so as to avoid the painful feelings that come with them. As a consequence, they are going into the world unprepared for the realities of adult life. At universities, lecturers are now required to give trigger-warnings. If they suspect that the subject matter of a talk might potentially produce painful feelings and negative emotional responses in the students, they have to forewarn them. The students can then make a decision as to whether they stay to listen to what is going to be said or leave.

People now also demand safe spaces where they will be protected. From what? From things that do not comply exactly with their view of the world. It is an attempt to solve the problem of suffering through the perpetual exclusion of all that is unwanted. You just cannot live like that. The unwanted will always find a way to seek you out. It is the case that the more you resist something, the more aware of it and fettered to it you become. If you have grown up without developing any emotional intelligence that will help you deal with the painful side of life, you will react with extraordinary immaturity when you are confronted with any of life's conflicts and dilemmas. We are certainly going to have some fun as members of "generation-Z" start coming along wanting to learn meditation. *(laughter)*

Protecting people from experiencing painful feelings does not work. It is attempting to be compassionate, but the true nature of compassion has not been understood. Learning requires us to exist in uncomfortable situations, the discomfort of not knowing how to do something or how something works, or just not knowing, full-stop.

When you come to a spiritual training, it has to be uncomfortable because you are going into the unknown. People often treat the spiritual path like it is some kind of buffet. (*laughter*) You go up with your plate and say, "Oh, I'll have a bit of that. They look nice. I'll have two of those," and you leave all the stuff you do not like. You just cannot follow the Path like that. Why is the practice sometimes painful? It is because you are, in some shape or form, misapplying yourself and either unaware of or belligerently refusing to acknowledge the truth. The more determined you are not to learn, the more and more painful the situation becomes until, finally, you let go and ask, "Alright, what is it I have to do?" Suddenly you are open to new ideas and possibilities, and then everything feels better again.

There are deep-rooted emotional attachments that need to be overcome if you wish to realise freedom from suffering. The training, therefore, must have "bite". That is why I have to step in when I recognise that a student is not fulfilling the parameters of the training. Pointing out the fault is painful for me and it is painful for the student. It is very necessary, however, for them to know that you cannot just take whatever you want, leave

the rest and still expect to get any deep meaningful spiritual insights. Spiritual insights do not come from choosing the easy stuff, they come from confronting and working with the difficult stuff. You have to be prepared to make genuine sacrifices.

The student has asked the teacher for guidance and training. In pointing out their mistaken ideas and wrong practices the teacher is simply performing that task. As a teacher, you know that you always run the risk that a student might be offended or upset. They will, of course, experience painful feelings and may well regard you as the cause of their discomfort. You run that risk and yet you are prepared to do it for them. You point out that, "I am not just doing this off the bat. I am doing this because I have recognised a pattern of behaviour over time that I can point to. It will be to your benefit if you are willing for us to look at this together."

To get back to the original point. Trying to stop people from experiencing painful feelings is unrealistic and is, actually, counter-productive. The compassionate thing to do is to allow kids the freedom to go out and play. Let them graze their knees and bash their heads, and learn how to take proper care of themselves through

that experiential learning. I guess this whole coddling of the youth notion is a necessary experiment. If it proves not to be working, then I am sure there will be a move back to a more pragmatic centre ground.

Student 2: You said it comes out of compassion or love for children?

Paul: It comes out of a misguided notion of compassion, certainly, the attempt to be compassionate.

Student 2: Yes. Thinking back to my childhood, I did not go to my grandfather's funeral because they did not think children should go. They were trying to protect me.

Paul: I remember at my mum's funeral, my brother's little girl was only six or so, and during the service she kept crying out, "Grandma! Grandma! Come back Grandma!" It was so sweet and yet it had everyone in floods of tears. They put her through it because they felt she had to know the truth about life.

Student 3: Is it true that often underlying the desire for other people not to be hurt is the fact that, actually, it is you who does not want to feel hurt?

Paul: Yes, that is a very valid point. Like when you put the dog "to sleep." Whose misery are you putting it out of? It is a judgement call, because sometimes you think the most hu-

mane thing to do here would be to alleviate the dog's suffering. It is not clear-cut at all. Knowing yourself is the key. This means being fully aware of your feelings and emotions on the matter. Then you have the capacity to recognise whether you are acting out of your own self-concern, or out of the best interests of the being you are looking after. Who is to say in any given circumstances which is the right choice? I do not think there are cut and dried answers to such ethical questions. Responding on a case by case basis seems like the most prudent thing to do. To know yourself through and through, however, is the key, I think.

Student 3: It seems even worse if it is a person. Several family members were not told when an aunt died. It was only years later I was told, "Oh, I thought I'd better not tell you so as not to upset you." But I really wanted to know.

Paul: Yes. I heard recently that a friend's mum died and she had not told her family how serious the condition was. She had not passed that information on because she did not want to worry them. If she wanted to avoid causing them suffering, the reality was that she actually gave them magnitudes more. As a consequence

of not telling them, they were not prepared psychologically when she died. It came out of the blue. A complete shock. Obviously, that was not her intention. She may have thought she was being compassionate, but it was probably more the desire to avoid difficult conversations and emotional upset.

One of the facets of clinging attachment is the use of justifications and excuses in order to continue to be able to ignore reality. Perhaps she could not bring herself to tell her family she was dying because she could not face the reality herself. To speak its name would make it real and certain. It would also, however, have immediately halved the burden of fear she must have been carrying. Certainly, the kind of world view you have adopted throughout life will have a major influence on your psychological well-being at such a fraught time.

Experiencing pain, both physical and mental, is part of our learning. Taking a six-year-old to her Grandma's funeral and opening her up to the fact of mortality was a brave thing to do. It was painful for everyone concerned but would it really have been more compassionate to protect the child from that knowledge?

It is not always the case that the arising of painful feelings means something bad is happening. Alan James has called pain the "universal teacher." I often tell students that when practising vipassana is hard it means that we are learning. When it is easy it is because we have learned something. The practice oscillates between these two poles. We need to become wise to painful feelings rather than avoid them. Through gaining experience of their true nature, we come to know that they are indeed transient and conditioned. That is an extraordinary discovery because it means we can stop trying to control everything and everyone around us, and can finally give life the breathing space it needs to flow freely and spontaneously. ■

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*The Aukana Trust is a registered charity
(no 326938) which provides instruction in
the Buddha's path to enlightenment,
from introductory evening classes
to full-time monastic training.*

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