



AUKANA

newsletter 7/2017

HOUSE OF INNER
TRANQUILLITY



"We know that a peaceful experience is just that, an experience. It will arise and it will pass away. There is another kind of peace, a transcendental peace that comes from gaining wisdom into the truth that all possible states have the nature to arise and pass away. Such insight leads to a complete abandonment of dependency upon anything in the world for one's happiness, including, paradoxically, the experience of peace itself. As you are no longer dependent on anything, nothing can ever let you down. You discover that this is the one true peace and one true freedom."

PAUL HARRIS

EDITORIAL

The world is going through a very volatile period and views are becoming ever more extreme. This, in turn, is conditioning the most terrifying and intense behaviour, such as the terrorist atrocities we have witnessed in London, Manchester and around the world in recent months. Media coverage of such shocking events and the issues that lie behind them seems deliberately calculated to engender the most passionate responses in the general public. Online, many people feel justified in giving full vent to their opinions and prejudices in the most strident and inflammatory manner possible. We live in a society that

continually reinforces the notion that the way you prove yourself is through the passion with which you uphold your beliefs. The corollary to this is, of course, the need to refute and destroy the views that run contrary to those you hold. As a result, people remain endlessly conflicted, polarised and isolated from one another, as differences are constantly being re-emphasised and distrust becomes entrenched.

Set against such an extreme social backdrop, the teachings of the Buddha appear to be extraordinarily mild by comparison. The Buddha maintained that his path to realise the ces-

sation of suffering was a “middle way” that avoided all extremes, including attachment to views. He advised us to live moderate, ethical lives, and to develop benevolence and tolerance towards all beings. Buddhism is unquestionably peace-loving and yet, at the same time, what the Buddha offers us is a far more radical vision of life than anything we are generally presented with in our culture.

Holding fast to views and beliefs of any kind, he maintained, was an outcome of a fundamental ignorance of reality that consequently leads to passionate desire and conflict. Despite the underlying assumption that tenaciously holding to one’s opinions will bring strength and stability, the actual result is always an ever increasing sense of personal isolation, emotional brittleness, instability and discord.

The Buddha’s wise counsel was for his students to give up all clinging attachment to views, given that they are always based in an ignorant grasp of reality and productive only of suffering. Instead, what we can do is to generate enough psychological space and calmness to be able to mindfully investigate the true nature of conscious reality as it unfolds. In doing so, we can come to a complete comprehension of life as it really is. It

is this, and this alone, that will eradicate the conflict that lies at the heart of existence.

We love the idea of realising freedom from suffering but are unaware that we may very well hold views that undermine our efforts. Often, we blindly assume that what the Buddha taught is actually a reflection of our own pre-existing belief system. That, in essence, the Buddha agrees with us and, therefore, the views and opinions we value will remain untouched by following his path. It can come as a shock to discover that this is not so. Inevitably, if we continue to walk this way there comes a moment when we are confronted with a stark choice, to give up the path or surrender a cherished view.

If we are willing to let go of all our assumptions and pursue this path to its conclusion, we come to realise that attachment to any view is nothing but a self-perpetuated mental prison. As the weight and pressure of continuously having to uphold beliefs is released, a most wonderful unbounded freedom is discovered. Though largely going unnoticed by the world, we pass through life harmlessly and happily, a cause of suffering to no-one. In the words of the Buddha, we become trackless, like a bird in the sky. ■

NEWS



Paul with Iain McNay

People: Earlier this year we were contacted by the satellite television channel Conscious TV as Paul had been suggested as a possible guest on their show. The channel is run and hosted by **Iain** and **Renata McNay**, both of whom have been spiritual practitioners for many years. The aim of their show is to stimulate debate, encourage and inspire people in the areas of consciousness, science, non-duality and spirituality. Iain's idea was for Paul to talk about his spiritual journey and his life as a monk. In March, **Dave Gilbert** kindly drove Paul to the television studios in Battersea, London where the interview took place. In April, the results were first broadcast on satellite television and made available online. The feedback has been very encouraging. The interview can be accessed via the Teachers page on our website.

In March, longstanding meditator

Lin Quantick came in to the Centre for a month of full-time training. This is the third time that Lin has been able to come in for what is, essentially, a month-long Integrated Retreat. Dependant on individual circumstances, longer-term stays at the Centre are possible for students. One of the many benefits the extended retreat gives is a far greater length of time to settle into the practice, which can lead to a much more relaxed, balanced approach, with consequent beneficial results.

Regular day students **Cathy Hilser** and **Sally Passfield** have taken on the duty of making the uniforms for the monastic community. They completed their first joint venture in the spring making a uniform for **Sister Sara** and then finished a uniform for **Brother Nigel** in time for the last lecture on 7 June. Although learning how to put the uniforms together was not easy, offering one's services to help those who give up their worldly life to follow the Buddha's teaching full-time will always be truly rewarding.

Garden: The focus of this spring's activity was on the preparation for the biennial Open Day on 18 June. A new bench was purchased for the far end of the vegetable plot as the old one was literally collapsing. The vegetable plot was planted up with



Cathy, Sister Sara and Sally

the intention of having a pleasing display as well as providing fresh produce for the kitchen. Due to the early prolonged dry spell only a few of the root vegetables and salad seeds germinated. Due also to the voracious appetites of the plump pigeons and mammoth slugs, some crops had to be replanted altogether. The onions and some of the beans, however, made a fine showing. The courgettes are doing particularly well with several reaching marrow size in seemingly no time at all. There is sure to be plenty of courgette soup available for lunch on retreat come the autumn.

Fortunately the rain came after a protracted dry period and when it did there was plenty of it. This ensured that the gardens became lush and verdant with everything growing apace. Brother Nigel was busy dividing and potting up plants for the stall on Open Day, as well as pruning and trimming the large shrubs and bushes

to tidy them. Day students were regularly allocated weeding duties or asked to clear up clippings.

The ponds were cleared of excess plants such as water soldiers (*Stratiotes aloides*) and leaves were removed from overgrown lilies (*Nymphaea*). Forty fish were introduced and distributed amongst the ponds in time for the last workshop on 20 May, giving the fish plenty of time to settle in to their new environment.

Much of the trimming and clipping was done in the week before Open Day to give the gardens that extra tidy appearance. The lawn was mown and the Wisteria trimmed. It was all hands to the helm that week with several extra people volunteering their services to help out in the afternoons.

Maintenance: Several projects were completed in the spring. The carpet in the annex corridor was replaced as planned and many meditators noticed the difference on returning for the first Wednesday meeting of the season. The underlay of the old carpet had disintegrated over time and turned to black dust that had trickled through the gaps between the floor boards. The new underlay is a non-perishable variety that has a deep, spongy but firm texture making walking on the new carpet a discernibly springy experience.

Ten years ago all the electrical wiring in the properties owned by the Trust was thoroughly checked and upgraded in order to comply with electrical certification regulations. The time had come round again to review the wiring and fuse boxes to renew the certificates. Our customary electrician, **Steve Ingram**, completed the inspection and replaced the now-outdated fuse boxes. He also rewired them with safety cut-out capabilities enabling the use of outdoor electrical equipment without the need for circuit breakers.

During the spring it became apparent that the telephone switchboard system which has been in use for well over twenty years was not functioning properly. It was sporadic in picking up calls remote from the office in no. 9. A similar wall mounted switchboard system and four new telephones were purchased to replace it. Steve Ingram was again called on to install it. The extension capacity of the new system is greater than the old one enabling the annex kitchen and the nuns' quarters to be put on separate lines rather than sharing one.

The roof replacement for 10 and 10a was rescheduled for this summer from last year. At the time of writing the Trust is waiting for confirmation of a date to start work. The council is expecting Masons Lane to be closed

this summer which would be an expedient time to work on the roof and would also save costs. Our roofer, **Nigel Tripp**, is in contact with the council and scaffolders, and regularly updates the Trust with the latest information.

In preparation for Open Day, the inside of the properties were given extra attention throughout the spring. Full-time students, day students and people on Integrated Retreat lent a hand at polishing the abundant wooden skirting boards, doors and window sills to nourish the wood and buff it up to a soft sheen.

Open Day: The week before Open Day was a busy time at the Centre. Day students and extra helpers were deployed both inside and out to thoroughly clean, dust, Hoover, weed and trim. Paul took on the onerous task of cleaning the veranda roof and supports while **Olivia Rowlatt** cleaned the windows underneath. Brother Nigel cleaned the glass windows above the drive gates. Dave Gilbert assisted greatly in helping relocate furniture, a standing Buddha and heavy plants. Tables were moved to the Ruby Room enabling **Anda Lutkevics** to set up the shop of books, Buddha figures, incense and new cards of watercolour paintings of the Centre. As well as many people lending a welcome hand, the full-timers gratefully re-

ceived several gifts of evening meals that enabled them to dedicate more of their afternoon time preparing for Open Day.

On the Saturday before Open Day eight helpers arrived in the afternoon. **Bev Howarth, Sue Hallissey, Yasmin Jennings** and **Julia Barton** put the finishing touches to the gardens. Paths were swept, the tea house was cleaned and the last vestiges of trimmings and fallen leaves removed. Grass edges were trimmed to give a clean and tidy look to the lawns and vegetable plot.

Indoors **Bodil Hart** and **Simone Knightley** beautifully arranged the flowers for the shrines and the bouquets that brightened some rooms and corridors. **Glenda Brewer** must have walked miles vacuuming all around the properties. **Alex Nicholson** was the intrepid window washer for the day as the majority of the outsides are done at the last minute. Brother Nigel put the finishing touches to the plant stall and Anda equipped and set up the tea stall. A review of the Open Day can be found on pages 10 and 11 of this Newsletter.

Online: There was a noticeable increase in traffic across the Centre's various online platforms, thanks in some measure to the impact of Paul's Conscious TV appearance. The YouTube channel now has ninety-

seven subscribers and over seven and a half thousand views. Although miniscule by internet standards, the videos have, nonetheless, led to people interested in taking up the path contacting the Centre. More videos will be recorded and posted later in the year. If anyone is interested in posing questions to Paul in one of these videos, please feel free to get in touch. Our YouTube and Facebook pages can be accessed via the buttons at the bottom of the website. The website itself is still in the process of being upgraded. The books page is now finished, with a fully mobile-friendly design that allows online visitors to purchase all the Aukana titles directly using their credit or debit cards. This autumn, we hope to start an audio database of lectures for people to access and download.

Satellite groups: **Jim Vuylsteke** runs the Toronto, Canada, group. Jim is currently exploring venues in central Toronto for holding meetings and conducting interviews. There has been little activity this spring but the members meet when they can.

Dan Curtis reports from the Victoria, Canada, group that six people attended their summer weekend silent retreat. This spring the group studied the Ten Fetters and Noble Eightfold Path and are currently studying the Buddhist approach to death. ■

BRADFORD ON AVON

HOUSE OF INNER TRANQUILLITY

RETREATS

6-Day Integrated Retreats

September 4-9

October 23-28

December 4-9

6-Day Silent Retreats

September 11-16

October 2-7

October 30-November 4

November 20-25

December 11-16

Weekend Retreats

September 22-24

October 13-15

November 10-12

TAPE & LECTURE EVENINGS

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

August 9

Lecture

August 16

Tape

August 23

Q&A

August 30

Tape

September 6

Lecture

September 13

Tape

September 20

Q&A

September 27

Tape

October 4

Lecture

October 11

Tape

October 18

Q&A

October 25

Tape

November 1

Lecture

November 8

Tape

November 15

Q&A

November 22

Tape

November 29

Lecture

December 6

Tape

December 13

Q&A

December 20

Lecture

SATURDAY WORKSHOPS

10am to 3pm

September 30

October 21

November 18

OPEN MEDITATIONS

Saturday mornings 10.15-11.15. The door will be open from 10.05am, August 12 - December 16 inc.

SATELLITE GROUPS

Activities: Please contact

Toronto Canada: Jim Vuylsteke

Tel: +1-416-536-5698

AukanaToronto@sunyata.ca

Victoria Canada: Dan Curtis

Tel: +1-250-598-5887

dancurtis8@gmail.com

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Open Day Review

Sunday 18 June followed an intensely hot and dry week so the intermittent cloud cover on the day was very welcome. 160 or so visitors came to the Centre, some from as far afield as Devon and Staffordshire. Everyone clearly enjoyed looking around the houses and gardens and engaging in conversation with the full-time community and meditators. The fish in the ponds performed well, creating mini shoals to fascinate the children

and the refreshments were gratefully received. Thank you to all the meditators and people who generously donated cakes and plants and gave their time to help out on the day and ensured it was such a success.

Helen Murray offered to take photos of the day and more of her pictures can be seen on the House of Inner Tranquillity Facebook page.



This page - Some helpers on 17 June with Brother Nigel and Anda.

Opposite page - Scenes from Open Day 18 June



Extract from a Dhamma Talk with full time students

Question: How can we develop courage?

Paul: Is it the courage, per se, that needs to be developed or is it, rather, something else that is imposing itself and needs to be understood? It is much the same with confidence. You do not need to create confidence because it is part of your natural state. It is, instead, dealing with doubt. Is it, therefore, courage that needs to be developed or is there something else that needs to be acknowledged?

Student 1: Often it can be self-doubting, self-hating type of thoughts that are really scuppering any decent attention that you might bring to anything.

Paul: Yes, absolutely. As another example, we all have mindfulness as a naturally occurring quality. You could not operate as a human being without mindfulness. Mindfulness is choiceless awareness of what is present now. We have that already, we do not have to make it. You merely have to apply it in the right areas. For the purposes of Insight meditation, for instance, we train to be aware of ultimate phenomena arising and passing

away. What is it that prevents mindfulness? It is the desire to be distracted in some way. To not be present, to be mentally elsewhere. With meditation, you are learning to stop turning habitually away from what you find, you are learning to remain mindful of whatever arises in your experience.

If we examine courage in terms of meditation, can you see that it is really not about the courage at all? It is about what mental quality is superimposing itself on that simple observation of experience and warping the meditation. What is the resistance and what is it a reaction to? I guess the courage is in acknowledging what we find and the willingness to stay with the unwelcome contacts, perceptions and feelings that we want to escape from.

Is it courage you need, though, or just a growing weariness of forever scuppering your own attempts to meditate? Is it courage you need, or is it reaching a point of being so utterly fed up of ignoring and resisting that you finally confront the real issue? You cannot move forward until you look at the thing you are refusing to look at.

Student 1: Last night before the

meditation you said, "If there is irritation, you are going to have to sit with it. It is no problem, you can sit for a whole hour with irritation." And my reaction was, "Oh yes, that's right!" (*laughing*)

Paul: If somebody has a deeply ingrained view, instilled, perhaps, during childhood, that irritation is wrong and should never occur, to be confronted with irritation when you are meditating can be extremely difficult. It is all very well to intellectually understand the need to be courageous in accepting its existence, but it is the emotional attachment to the rule that is the problem. The rule says you should never be irritated. You discover irritation and immediately assign that to be part of your personality, and, because according to the rule irritation is wrong, your personality is, therefore, wrong. You are wrong. That is a really untenable, and painful situation to be in. Understandably, there is then a strong urge to deny and ignore the reality of that through some form of escapism. The effect of that subsequent resistance, is to make the original irritation seem even more overwhelming and powerful, and the habitual urge to go into displacement activities becomes even stronger. This, again, makes the problem appear even mightier and

more demonic. It is a very challenging situation.

Ultimately, the solution has to be to look at the thing you do not want, because the reality is it is not the huge, impenetrable problem you think it is. You perceive it like that only because of the degree of resistance you have historically afforded it. You make it important through your resistance. It does not have any inherent significance. It is all just life stuff. It is no more important than a cloud passing through the sky, or a bee buzzing past. (*laughter*) To the individual concerned, however, it appears ever so important.

How are you going to deconstruct that? How are you going to reduce that demon to its true size? It can only be through having the courage, or the degree of frustration, to go against your habitual conditioning. You need the determination to go against that self-enforced rule and to uproot the belief about the nature of your personality. You need to set up a practice with a revolutionary attitude, which is to let the unwanted thing happen, and simply watch.

To help cushion the impact you can develop all the supporting structures that the Buddha's teaching offers us, like keeping precepts and practising recollections, loving kindness and compassionate activities.

Ultimately, however, there has to be the conviction that there is no longer a viable alternative. What? You are going to continue to practise these displacement activities for how long? Do you really think that conditions will be better in the future? No. The demon will appear even greater to you in the future because you are consistently avoiding looking at it now.

In the Pali Canon there is the story the Buddha told his monks of the pot-bellied *yakka* who took over the throne of Sakka, King of the Devas, while he was away. The King's attendants were all in a fluster about it, but that just had the effect of making the demon look ever-more handsome and king-like as he sat on the throne. Finally Sakka came back and knelt before the *yakka*. Essentially he practised humility in front of him, with a complete lack of any resistance. By not feeding the demon any power, the demon just reverted to his true ugly, pot-bellied countenance and disappeared there and then.

It is a perfect allegory really. The trick is to learn to turn round and bow to the irritation or whatever it happens to be. That is the revolutionary response. It is doing the last thing you would ever think of doing. During the Conscious TV interview I did with Iain McNay, I talked about a moment in my life when I spontaneously let go

completely and I let life win. It was, in some senses, quite fortuitous. I subsequently entered full-time training and learnt how to do it again, but this time consciously, properly, with total awareness of what was taking place. Essentially that is what the training is getting us to do, to let life win. The ego is that wilful insistence that "life should be the way I want it to be," and that includes fear. Fear is a form of wilful resistance. Really we are not talking about courage so much as we are talking about confronting fear and allowing fear to be there.

What happens if you allow fear to exist? What would you expect to happen?

Student 2: Initially you would feel very uncomfortable.

Paul: What form would the discomfort take?

Student 2 : You would not know what was going to happen. You are always looking for a place of security and understanding of what is going on, and you have left yourself wide open.

Student 3: Physically tense, ready to freak out, perhaps. There would be lots of restlessness in the body. Lots of palpitations.

Student 1: The desire to run away.

Paul: So on the physical level we are talking about an adrenalin rush, perhaps? That is what you get in a dangerous situation. If I am up a ladder I want a sense of fear to be there, it is keeping me safe. All those physical manifestations are there to help make sure that I am alert. Are these conditions permanent or impermanent?

Student 2 : Impermanent.

Paul: If you are not resisting, and you are just allowing that process to unfold and looking at the physical components of that experience, it will pass won't it? The fear is real, alright, but the freaking out is because you resist the fear. If you have that conviction born of understanding that there is no alternative but to look at it, you look at it. If you break the experience down into its component parts, physical and mental, and simply watch, it passes, whatever it is. The next time you are confronted with a similar process, it is not as strong because you changed the dynamics of your response last time.

Then one day, lo and behold, somebody comes up to you and asks how you developed courage. (laughter) Looking back I cannot say for sure I ever did. I guess there had to

be courage but, actually, it was born of desperation. It was the courage of a man whose hair is on fire. There is not really much alternative to finding a bucket of water to put your head in. Is it a courageous act to go and find that bucket of water?

Student 1: Does it help to talk to your teacher or others in similar situations?

Paul: Yes. Whenever I talk to somebody who is going through the stage known as of Knowledge of Fear on the Insight path, what they seem most reassured by is the empathy that is displayed. I have been through the same processes and know what they are experiencing. If I seem extremely happy with them it is because I genuinely am happy for them. I know that if they persist they will get through this particular stage and they will get to discover the wonder of what lies beyond. ■

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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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