



AUKANA

newsletter 7/2018

HOUSE OF INNER
TRANQUILLITY



If your internal map of life is still at odds with reality you will still crave for life to be different. If you are craving for life to be different, you are not looking at it. You have to look at it, mindfully investigate it, to correct your views and perceptions of how life actually is.

Once there is a perfect correlation between your map and reality, that is when this transcendent understanding which is not caught up in space and time becomes self-evident. It is not caught up in past, present or future. It is not caught up in the aggregates. It transcends all and, yet, is always here, freely available. It is just that people ignore it.

PAUL HARRIS

EDITORIAL

We are living in an age of ever-accelerating technological advancement. The term transhumanism has been coined to signify a major evolutionary transition that is increasingly merging technology, biology, and civilization. Digital technology has already permeated the fabric of human society and brought with it a high degree of dependency. A significant proportion of our communications and interactions, be they financial, academic or social, are now conducted exclusively through digitally mediated channels. We increasingly trust artificial intelligence with our lives through anti-lock braking in cars and autopilots in aeroplanes. Apparently, one in three marriages in the United States

now originate from relationships first formed online. So, digital algorithms, as well as influencing our voting habits and consumer choices, are also taking a leading role in human pair-bonding and reproduction.

There are many life-enhancing innovations on the way. For instance, bionic technology, formerly the stuff of children's fantasy television shows, is now a reality. From DIY prosthetics produced through 3D printing technology to customised artificial intelligence-driven limbs, science is helping to remove many of the physical barriers faced by disabled people. Technological advances in medicine will allow us to continuously repair and replace defective components

in our bodies, prolonging life to an undetermined age. Nanotechnology, tiny machines essentially, will be able to operate within our bodies performing cellular repairs. Genetic disorders may soon be a thing of the past with human DNA being superseded by synthetically created genes. Designer children, anyone?

For the more conservative among us, such developments might well be viewed as potentially calamitous and intimidating, playing havoc with one's sense of universal order. For progressive types, these advances are more likely to be regarded as radical and exciting, resolving all our problems and ushering in a whole new era of human, or even post-human, existence. But are these developments going to make life better for us all, worse or just different?

From a Buddhist perspective, such a technological evolution of our species cannot be said to be either a good or bad idea. It is, literally, just how life is unfolding and, actually, no-one is in control anyway. Ethical responsibility is rooted in consciousness. It is our volitional actions and the intentions behind them that determine whether we experience happy or painful lives. Machines, in and of themselves, have no intelligence, no motivation, no autonomy, and no agency. Although, increasingly, we

may design them to behave as if they have a degree of independence, there is no psychological reality to the corresponding processes or behaviour. The machines remain, in and of themselves, ethically non-aligned. It is our insatiable human curiosity that is driving this technological evolution. It is mind-made. It is the product of our ongoing desire to experience, to create and to know. And that is where ethical responsibility lies.

There is that old adage about how the more things change, the more they stay the same. No amount of creative innovation will alter the fundamental natural laws and processes of existence. Whatever we make will break. Worldly existence is fundamentally unsatisfactory and we suffer if we live and act in ignorance of this timeless truth. Practising Insight meditation, we see that whatever arises is subject to inevitable decay. We see that existence is a flux of forever shifting conditions that cannot, ultimately, be controlled. Yet, out of this mass of uncertainty emerges the conscious ordering of existence. Life can and does make sense, even though it is in a state of perpetual change. The wise meditator sees and understands this, and is able, therefore, to step back, content to watch and marvel as the mysterious patterns of life unfold and evolve, endlessly. ■

News

Maintenance: After an unforeseeable series of delays the roof of 10 and 10a Masons Lane is finally being replaced this summer. The council met with the roofer, scaffolders and **Brother Nigel** to formulate a plan. Work began at the end of June when the scaffolders arrived to erect scaffolding at the rear of the building so that work could begin on the garden side of the roof. The following week **Mr Tripp**, accompanied by his son **Robbie** and assistant roofer **Dan**, began the task of removing and storing the tiles and clearing out the roof space. Previously, only the loft area accessible from the top floor of the building had been insulated and there was no felting under the roof tiles. Mr Tripp and his team are, therefore, felting and insulating the entire roof. They are also removing rotten wood lining the sides of the dormer windows and replacing it with lead. The two roof windows are being replaced as well. The work has been tiring due to the unremitting extreme heat over the summer but the team have been able to carry on regardless.

The scaffolders will return to erect full scaffolding at the front of the house. As this will extend onto the pavement a walkway will be constructed around it to allow safe access

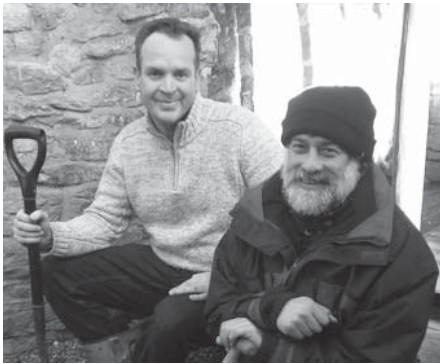
for pedestrians. This will cause some disruption to traffic but it will be minimised by having scaffolding at the front for the shortest period possible and timing the project to coincide with school holidays when traffic flow will be lighter. Brother Nigel will take the opportunity to repair and paint the outside of all the top floor windows. The scaffolders will construct an extra platform on the road side so that the lower windows can also be painted.

Garden: The gravelled area adjacent to the compost bins on the vegetable plot was completed and planted with *Yuccas* selected for their rain tolerance to survive the British winter. Fortunately they also thrive in the persistent hot and dry conditions that we are experiencing this summer.

The Trust invested in a vermin and rodent proof compost bin, available at a bargain price through the local council. It has been placed opposite the stone compost bins behind the new gravelled area. It is used for vegetable and food waste from the kitchen. Many years ago we used to compost food waste but unfortunately it attracted rats so the practice was stopped. Its reintroduction has reduced the waste from the Centre going to landfill by a considerable amount. The Trust already makes

use of kerbside recycling collection and makes regular trips to the local recycling centre to dispose of plastics, card and other items.

Work started early in the year clearing out the lowest pond in the Japanese garden so that it could be repaired and painted with sealant to stop the leaks. The weather was cold but bright when **James Treacy** and **José Guerrero** who were both on integrated retreat donned Wellington boots, woolly jumpers and hats to begin work on the pond.



James Treacy and José Guerrero

They transferred the fish and other aquatic life with some pond water into large bins. Some of the pond lilies, water soldiers and other plants were also stored and the excess was composted. The remaining water, sludge and decaying vegetable matter was removed and used as compost on

some of the flower beds. Any wildlife that had previously avoided the fishing-net was moved to safety and the pond was rinsed clean. The pond was re-filled with water ready for the silent retreat the following week. Before any further work could be done, however, the toads and frogs sequestered the ponds for their breeding season. The repairs were, therefore, postponed until the summer.

When the last retreat of the season was over the water was fully removed again ready for repairs to begin. Brother Nigel scrubbed the walls of the pond clean and inspected the concrete walls to assess the damage. He filled some larger holes with a waterproof concrete mix that had to harden off completely for five days. A special waterproof green epoxy resin paint was used to seal all the internal surfaces of the pond and stepping stones. On the day scheduled for painting, the sun shone brightly and Brother Nigel set to work with the help of day student **Scott Harris**.

They decided to seal the small interconnecting pools in the Japanese garden as well. The mixed paint had to be applied within two hours before it set rock hard. So, while Brother Nigel painted, Scott worked ahead of him scrubbing the unprepared small pools clean and dry. Both worked at a

fine pace and completed the first coat within the allotted time. A second coat was applied at a more leisurely pace a few days later.



Scott Harris

Online: The Trust is very aware, in this modern, technological age, of the need to adapt and develop new strategies for disseminating the Buddha's teaching. At the beginning of 2018 we began the House of Inner Tranquillity podcast through which our extensive archive of lectures by **Alan, Jacqui** and **Paul** are being made available. The service has proved to be very popular, with twenty-two talks uploaded so far and almost four and a half thousand 'listens.' To access the lectures on the Aukana website click on the headphone icon on the right-hand side of the menu bar to bring up the Audio page. The pod-

casts can also be downloaded via iTunes, Spotify or a variety of other podcast directories.

We now have one hundred and forty subscribers to our YouTube channel and our videos have been accessed over thirteen thousand times. We are keen to develop this service further as we feel it offers a new and distinctive way of propagating the Buddha's teaching. As an alternative to the more conventional approach of writing another book, Paul has decided to develop a long-standing idea for a new series of videos on the subject of *Paticcasamuppāda*. Condition-dependent origination is such a deep and complex subject that it requires far more time to convey than the thirty minute Wednesday talks will allow. The ongoing series of videos will, therefore, be aimed primarily as a resource for the benefit of current students at the Centre. The style of the videos will be different from previous ones, with Paul talking directly to the viewer and using visual elements to augment and help clarify the spoken content. The hope is that the channel will become more interactive, with Paul being able to respond to the viewers comments and questions in subsequent videos. The project is very much still at the planning stage but we hope to have

it up and running during the autumn.

For those interested in hearing the words of the Buddha translated into English, visit Paliaudio.com which has been set up by meditators, **David Gilbert** and **Roland Kitchen**. There you will find a selection of discourses from the Pali Canon.

Classes and Workshops:

The spring season saw a welcome return of the Monday evening Pali Canon Classes. It is not always easy tailoring the content of the classes to suit the participants' various levels of experience and expertise. At the beginning, Paul made it clear that he felt the Centre's duty was to raise students' understanding rather than dumb down to the lowest common denominator. He encouraged them to relax about not immediately understanding the material, and assured them that they would all come away with a better understanding of the teaching than when they began. The students acknowledged this and there was a very positive attitude in the group with everyone contributing to the discussions, which made for a very enjoyable series of classes. There are more planned for the autumn.

As well as helping the development of existing meditators it is also vital for the Centre to nurture the fledgling aspirations of those who

are beginning to take an interest in mindfulness and meditation. We are, therefore, continuing to offer our popular one-day mindfulness workshops for anyone who is interested. The need to manage time and energy means we are currently limiting them to one per season. If you know anyone who would be interested in attending a workshop they can be directed to the Aukana website or the House of Inner Tranquillity Facebook page for details.

Satellite groups: **Jim Vuylsteke** in Toronto, Canada reports that, in May, his group spent a quiet meditative weekend together, following the Aukana retreat schedule. They meditated for eight hours a day and shared the cooking. Meetings will be held at Jim's home for the foreseeable future. Now that the venue can be confirmed the website promoting the Toronto group can be launched.

The group in Victoria, Canada still meets weekly and they held their annual weekend retreat in June.

Dan Curtis who helps to organise the group says that they have spent several months studying topics from the Buddha's teaching. Perceptions and the Five Aggregates have been completed. Currently they are studying *The Mahā-Mangala Sutta* on blessings (*Sutta-Nipāta* 2.4). ■

BRADFORD ON AVON

HOUSE OF INNER TRANQUILLITY

RETREATS

6-Day Integrated Retreats

September 3-8

October 22-27

December 3-8

6-Day Silent Retreats

September 10-15

October 1-6

October 29-November 3

November 19-24

December 10-15

Weekend Retreats

September 21-23

October 12-14

November 9-11

TAPE & LECTURE EVENINGS

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

August 8

Lecture

August 15

Tape

August 22

Q&A

August 29

Tape

September 5

Lecture

September 12

Tape

September 19

Q&A

September 26

Tape

October 3

Lecture

October 10

Tape

October 17

Q&A

October 24

Tape

October 31

Lecture

November 7

Tape

November 14

Q&A

November 21

Tape

November 28

Lecture

December 5

Tape

December 12

Q&A

December 19

Lecture

SATURDAY WORKSHOPS

10am to 3pm
September 29

CLASSES **MONDAY EVENINGS**

7.30 to 9.45pm
Pali Canon
November 5, 12, 19, 26,
December 3

OPEN MEDITATIONS

Saturday mornings 10.15-
11.15. The door will be
open from 10.05am,
August 11 - December 15
inc.

SATELLITE GROUPS

Activities: Please contact
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AukanaToronto@sunyata.ca
Victoria Canada: Dan Curtis
Tel: +1-250-598-5887
dancurtis8@gmail.com

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Other Voices: Marc Cooper



Q: When did you start attending the Centre?

Marc: "I think it was about a year ago, just before the summer break of 2017 when I first came. I got in touch to arrange to meet Paul. I came to just say 'Hi,' and I ended up having quite a nice tour of the place. I really felt everyone was generous with their time. Paul encouraged me to come along and try it for six weeks to see how it went. I came for one week and then the summer break happened and I tried again in August. It was

then my doubts began. I kept coming to the meditation but I just didn't understand much of what was being said in terms of the aim, the technique and the principles. I mean, I heard it but I wasn't experiencing it.

"It was around Christmas last year that I sent Paul about five different emails, one saying, 'Thanks for everything, but I am not coming back.' Then another email saying, 'Oh, actually, no.' I remember once having sent an email saying, 'Sorry, I can't do this any more.' It was literally within minutes I felt like, 'What am I doing? Of course I have to.'

"I got over some of the initial doubts over the winter. What helped was listening to podcasts, reading books and coming along regularly to the Wednesday evening meditations. I learned that doubt is one of the hindrances and what to do when I see a hindrance. Thanks to coming here, I am better at simply labelling and not indulging them as much. Now I am interested to see when doubt does arise.

"Through all this 'yes, no, yes, no,' stuff I still managed to book a couple of retreats. I did a weekend followed about a month later with a week, which, for me, was perfect because

the weekend just eased me in.”

Q: Was there any reticence about doing retreats, not having done them before?

Marc: “Yes. Doubt, fear and worry came up before the weekend retreat because I didn’t know whether I could do it and what it entailed. The weekend was a real luxury, actually. To be able to spend two days to focus, to have the time and space just to practise. I remember on the Saturday, I think it must have been the fourth hour being in the Shrine Room, thinking, ‘Wow, I can do this. It’s midday on a Saturday and I am currently sat in my fourth hour of meditation. This is incredible.’ It was great to see that I could do it. It felt right and natural.

“When I came back for the week retreat I didn’t have that anxiety about whether or not I could manage it. I guess it’s a beginner’s mistake, but I kind of expected the second retreat to start where the first one had left off; that I would just seamlessly continue. That was really useful for me because I saw really clearly that retreats are different. Retreats are transient and never the same. I quickly saw that the meditations are different too. I could have a really nice meditation, followed by a difficult one, followed by an indifferent one, followed by a

beautiful hour.

“I looked closer and I began to see that everything that came up was different. I went out into the garden and looked around and I was noting that everything I saw was always completely new. I did a walking meditation in the Japanese Garden and I saw that every step was different. I could see similar patterns, but all the movements, the pressures and sounds, all the experiences were completely new, every single time.

“The Wednesday night of the retreat I was in my cell in a completely happy mood, thinking, ‘Everything is beautiful because everything is completely new.’ I was watching all these thoughts arising and passing away. Then I did the same with the breathing. Every breath is, essentially, a new, transient experience. This is stuff I had read about, heard so many times, but not actually experienced for myself until that Wednesday evening here.

“So, that’s where I am. I love it. I am thinking next year I might try back-to-back retreats. I can’t really explain it to people but I am experiencing it for myself. That’s really important to me. When I can experience something for myself I can have complete faith in it. It has only been a year yet I have gotten so much from doing this.” ■

Extract from a Dhamma Talk with full time students

Question: When is awareness of time helpful to practice and when is it an obstacle?

Paul: What is time? I am not sure I know. It is just a concept really, isn't it? I mean, the 22nd of February 1974 is just an idea. We interpret what the display on a watch means. My watch does not even have numbers on it, just lines rotating at various speeds. There is nothing objectively real there which is 'time.' It is a set of symbols being interpreted to mean something.

Or, consider the earth rotating on its axis as it moves around the sun, giving us night and day, and years. We notice patterns and apply concepts to delineate and count those various movements and patterns. As a consequence we get this idea of time passing. So, we say it is 2018, but is it really? What does that actually mean? After all, it was a completely arbitrary point at which we began numbering rotations around the sun.

There are very practical issues with regards to time and the training. Why do we have a schedule for full-time students and on retreats? What is it trying to instil?

Student 1: It instils a sense of discipline. It helps people to be mindful and develop all the things they need to gain understanding.

Paul: Yes. It helps develop their spiritual faculties, mindfulness being integral to that. Why is it that we stick to a time period for meditation, whether that is half an hour or an hour. What is the purpose of delineating a period of time for practice?

Student 2: If you are having difficulties you may want to finish early. If it is going well you might want to carry on, but you still stick to the planned time.

Paul: Exactly. It is part of the discipline. There is a time for beginning and ending. You do not change tack just because it is not going the way you had expected it to. Working within parameters which are set from without will help to show up areas of attachment. Marking time in that way is really useful.

There is another aspect to time which is extraordinarily important, and why time becomes such an issue with meditation. It has to do with the way perception works. Essentially,

the more self-conscious we are, the greater one's awareness of time is. When, however, the mind is absorbed in some experience consequently there is a profound absence of the perception of passing time or of oneself. In a meditation, an hour goes by in what feels like ten minutes because one is truly absorbed in attending to what is taking place. What is that to do with? It is an absence of measuring. It is an absence of reinforcing the sense of 'myself' as separate through the constant measuring of experience. There is just absorption in the experience. If time were this objectively real thing, then it would not alter. But we find that time is a perception and is, therefore, malleable and flexible. In that sense, what is the best attitude to take regarding time when meditating?

Student 1: To set aside time. To note the perception of time if you are aware of it, like you would anything else.

Paul: For us practising here in Bradford on Avon, the church bell in the town rings on the hour and the half hour. If you are not one-pointedly absorbed in something, or utterly distracted by something else then the awareness of that sound may well

prompt the perception of time. There is an instantaneous measurement. Then there is that immediate sense of oneself as distinct from and in relation to that. That is really interesting to observe.

If it is someone early on in their meditative journey, they may very well hear the bell at eleven o'clock, count the chimes and think, "Oh no, there are still fifteen minutes to go." Further on, they may very well have a similar experience and the response is, "Oh, there are only fifteen minutes to go." The arising of boredom is the measurement of oneself against experience, isn't it? The measurement is a time based perception, "How much longer before the end of the session?" What is somebody to do in that situation? Note the boredom, note the strong resistance, and the wish for change. Which is ironic given that everything changes. If you were to just follow the instruction to pay attention to all these fleeting momentary events, you would be interested and absorbed in that, and, therefore, would not be aware of passing time. So, time has major significance with regard to the practice.

Student 1: I was also thinking about reflecting on time passing. It depends

on character type, but if you are the lazy type, it helps to reflect on time passing, the years going by.

Paul: Yes. A reflection on the brevity of the opportunity, and, therefore, not to just squander the chance. The opportunity to practise now is the inheritance of all the actions you have ever performed. Are you going to squander that legacy or make the most of it? Because there is only a limited time where you have appropriate supporting conditions. Do not wait to do this in heaven. It will not work. *(laughter)* You will just be having such a good time, you will not give it second thought. You have to come to this scheme of things to do this kind of work. Do you really want to keep coming back over and over again, and be confronted with gravity again? *(laughter)* And have to breathe in this weird gas that you have to share with everyone else? Yuck. You have to keep on eating. Well, eating is alright but the body has to process it all, which is pretty disgusting. And you want more? Do it now while you have got the chance. So, absolutely, a recollection on passing time is very useful in that sense.

Student 1: Of course, time is treated as though it is something objective and solid. It is everywhere, there are so many clocks and watches and things.

Paul: Yes. I have a friend who was, frankly, astonished, when I said a watch was one of the requisites for a monk. Yes, we need to measure time. Time is not the problem. Time has utility. In the Buddha's day they marked time using the position of the sun and moon. Today we have watches and diaries. Same difference.

Most people's world view conforms to the notion of a linear timeline beginning with the Big Bang happening thirteen billion years ago. Everything is viewed from within this concept of time. So, there is the evolution of the universe, the evolution of Planet Earth, the evolution of biology and the evolution of human history. Typically, people view their lives as being the product of and the continuation of what started with the Big Bang. What is unfolding now is considered to be the continuation of the Big Bang, moving outwards and onwards. The Buddha's teaching is not denying that evolutionary timeline, but points out the reality of another timeline, which is the *kammic*

timeline. Essentially, the result of our past *kamma* has brought us into this life at this specific point in the evolutionary timeline. We move along as part of it for a while and then, having lived out our lives here, we all move off into another existence altogether. We are literally just passing through. Developing insight-wisdom into the unfolding mind/body experience meditators come to see that it is this timeline that is ultimately real and theories like the Big Bang and evolution belong to the conceptual universe. This leads to a very different understanding of time.

When you are immersed in noting ultimate experience, there is the recognition that all these conditioned and conditioning elements arise and pass away timelessly. There might be the application of the label, "It is eleven o'clock," but there is the clear recognition that this is just a perception, a concept arising in that moment due to conditions, and ceasing instantly. So, the concept of time is arising in timelessness. With continued observation the comprehension dawns there is just this timeless arising and passing away, an endless flow of ultimate experience not bound within those mental constructs of time, location or selfhood, at all.

The beautiful thing is you do not lose the ability to look through the prism of evolutionary biology or astrophysics, or anything like that. You are still able to see life from those points of view, but you are not caught in the prison of time any more. You are released from the prison of time. You see that, actually, what is unfolding is entirely timeless. That is fundamentally freeing. You discover you have got all the time in the world. Once you are no longer a hostage of time, space and self-delusion, then you realise all of existence is just a timeless flowing and that all things are, therefore, possible. You can investigate and explore this unbelievable, infinite playground in any way you choose to. You have just got to do the hard work first, which is learning how to get free from being a prisoner to time. ■

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HOUSE OF
INNER TRANQUILLITY

*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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