



AUKANA

newsletter 7/2019

HOUSE OF INNER
TRANQUILLITY



“Enlightenment is not the end of the journey. The journey is endless. There is no ultimate destination. It is just a question of whether or not you are suffering as you go.”

PAUL HARRIS

EDITORIAL

We hope everyone who came to our Open Day in June had an enjoyable time. It was certainly great to see so many people taking an interest in the life and work of the House of Inner Tranquillity.

The Centre acts as a representative of the Buddha’s teaching and Open Day is an advertisement for the influence that practising the Noble Eightfold Way will have. In a world that is consumed by so much political, cultural and environmental turmoil, a haven of mutual respect, peace and well-being will certainly stand out.

The world is in a state of perpetual chaos because everyone is looking for peace, happiness and fulfilment; it is just they are looking for it in the wrong places and in the wrong way. We are constantly being told of everything that we need in order to have the perfect life. If we do not have those things the world tells us we need, we cannot be perfect. We crave for life to be different, therefore, and suffer

accordingly. The more we chase the unattainable goals that modern-day ‘influencers’ present us with, the more the sense of restless dissatisfaction and depression grows. The more we greedily exploit the world’s limited resources and each other, in the race to realise these ambitions, the more disordered the world appears. The more we gain at the expense of others, the more fearful of potential loss we become and, consequently, perceive the world and others as threatening.

There is a world of difference between aiming towards being perfect and living a life of perfect being. The former denies the unsatisfactory nature of reality and causes us to suffer. The latter embraces unsatisfactoriness and does not create suffering. Take the Open Day preparations as an example. Had we aimed for ‘perfection’ we would have ended up rushed, stressed out and miserable. There will have been a sense of carrying an

enormously heavy burden around and of perpetually being up against the clock. There simply would never have been enough time or manpower to accomplish that ideal. Instead, we chose to do what we could with what time, resources and energy were available to us. Rather than crave to reach some external perfection, the aim was to undertake the tasks with mindful attention, balanced energy and a light touch, free of unreasonable expectations and attachment to results. And this is what is meant by 'perfect being.' Not everything was completed in time, but on the day no-one noticed. What visitors were far more likely to have observed was the sense of unhurried order and calmness, the sense of things naturally being in their right place.

Learning how to practise the art of 'perfect being' is not at all easy. You will notice on the diary page that we are organising three one-day mindfulness workshops for the autumn. The first point that will be made to attendees is that mindfulness is not a 'magic ticket' to happiness. To truly be happy you must first understand what it is you do to create your own suffering, then learn how to let go of it. Practising mindful attention means learning to look at and accept the existence of life's unsatisfactoriness

and all its imperfections. This means stopping making all those comparisons between reality as it is unfolding and the idealistic version of reality that we have been sold or have sold to ourselves. Acknowledging and accepting reality as it spontaneously unfolds, warts and all, you begin to see and comprehend life in ways you could never have suspected possible before. You recognise how fleeting and insubstantial everything really is and how clinging desperately onto the things of life only makes you miserable. You comprehend exactly how illusory those worldly ambitions really are and how chasing them only perpetuates that sense of dis-ease. You naturally start letting go of false aspirations and prefer to live freely in the moment, this moment. You start to take far more interest in and delight in simply attending to conscious experience as it is unfolding as you go about your daily business. Finally it dawns on you that the perfection you have always been seeking has never been denied you. It is all around, inside and out, here now. It is just you had been blinded to it by all that self-seeking and worldly ambition. In the absence of all that, you realise that this very reality that is unfolding right now is the perfection you have always wanted.



NEWS

Open Day: Preparations began early in the year for our biennial Open Day. Students on the spring Integrated retreats were tasked with mindfully polishing wooden skirting boards, cupboards and doors during their working afternoons. Closer to the big day in June, they were also busy cleaning road-side windows.

Our master gardener **Brother Nigel** was determined that the vegetable plot would flourish this year. In order to prevent newly germinated beans from being munched by the pigeons, he wrapped chicken wire around the bamboo frames the beans would eventually climb up. He also protected the fledgling courgette and butternut squash plants by covering them with plastic dome cloches until they grew to a substantial size. The vegetable garden's south-facing aspect and slope means that the topsoil is often dry and dusty. Plenty of early summer rain and fresh compost, however, helped to ensure that the plot flourished. As well as the beans and squashes, lettuce, beetroot, onions, carrots, rainbow chard and radishes all thrived.

The weeds did too, of course, and it took regular weeding by retreatants and day students to ensure that the

vegetable patch looked its best for the day.

Quite a few students propagated and donated plants for us to sell on our garden plant stall. Alas, a few of them did not make it as far as the Open Day (the plants, that is). The garden's resident slugs and snails wasted no time in sampling the new delicacies upon their arrival. There were, however, still plenty for people to buy on the day. Brother Nigel also dug up some of the spectacular cacti that grow in the greenhouse and put them in the dark shed in the vegetable garden so that they would not flower before Open Day. Plants that are from the garden and potted up for sale, are always popular as they provide people with a lasting memento from their visit to the Centre.

There was a period of dry weather during the spring, but this was followed by an extended cooler, wet spell which only came to an end a few days before the day itself. The timing was perfect and the garden loved it. The plants grew large and lush, giving a sense of flourishing, burgeoning life to the various secluded nooks and crannies of the garden.

It is great that so many meditators were able to donate some of their

time during the week before Open Day. So much was able to be done, despite the many showers. There was a dramatic change of weather on the Friday before Open Day, when the sun shone and the temperature shot up. The timing was ideal for cleaning the veranda outside no. 9. Paul volunteered for the job and set-to with bucket and mop on a step ladder to clean the walls before he started on the roof with an assortment of implements including an extending squeegee. The job took two afternoons to complete.

On Saturday, people arrived to help out with the final preparations. **Bodil Hart** and **Simone Knightley** were responsible for arranging the flowers that were positioned in all the rooms. **Bev Howarth** spent the afternoon vacuuming throughout nos. 10 and 9. **Natalie Watson** brought her two granddaughters, **Ruby** and **Bonnie**, to help out in the garden. **Julia Barton** trimmed grass edges and weeded. **Stephen Marsden** cleaned light fittings. **Sister Sara** and **Sue Hallissey** cleaned plastic mats and placed them in the office which was to serve as the shoe store for people going into the houses. The windows on the garden side of the building were cleaned by **Dave Gilbert**, **José Guerrero** and **Birgit Foerster** and

they finished off tidying the garden in the remaining time.

Anda Lutkevics put up labels around the buildings and set up the shop selling books, Buddha figures and incense. We also had cards on sale, which were donated by meditators who had had them printed from watercolours and photographs of the Centre's grounds. The last piece of the Open Day jigsaw was the all-important tea and cake stall. As ever, it was set up in the annex kitchen, but only after Paul and the full-time community had enjoyed a take-away evening meal donated by a meditator. Now everything was ready for the day itself.

On 23 June the full-time students did some last minute duties and the many helpers arrived to take up their allotted posts and get last minute instructions. Cakes had been donated in the previous few days and even more arrived as the tea stall opened. The weather, which had looked so promising given the sunny previous two days, was warm but overcast. There were even light showers during the afternoon. Happily, the visitors were not deterred. We estimate one hundred and seventy people came through the gates to wander round the gardens and tour the buildings guided by their meditator friends.

It was great to catch up with many former monks, nuns and lay students as well.

Everyone partook of refreshments, bought plants and books, and enjoyed the atmosphere of friendliness and care that accompanies an Open Day. When the showers came, brollies came out and people continued to chat undaunted on the lawns.

Thank you to everyone who gave their time and energy, and helped in so many ways to make the day a great success. Visitors always leave with a favourable impression of the Centre and that is due in no small part to the work, generosity and enthusiasm of the lay community.

Pali Canon Class: Seven meditators attended the Pali Canon classes this spring, including two for whom sutta study was entirely new. Despite the sometimes unfamiliar terminology and cultural idioms, repeated exposure to the texts reveals a wealth of wisdom for students to tap into. For these classes, discourses were chosen from Middle Length Sayings Vol. I. Paul encouraged the meditators to engage thoroughly with the material by asking them to prepare a six line synopsis of each sutta to be presented at the classes. Although a daunting task for some, the reality

was, however, that the extra hour of home-study meant that students came to the classes well prepared and more able to embrace the challenging subjects under discussion. No Pali Canon classes have been organised for the autumn, to allow more time to cater for the demand for mindfulness workshops. We hope to do some more next spring.

Workshops: We have organised three mindfulness workshops for the autumn, largely to cater for any potential interest emerging from the Open Day and our social media campaigns. The workshops are intended primarily to be practical in nature with plenty of guided meditations, along with brief talks about the theory behind the practice. They are suitable both for those new to Buddhist mindfulness and those seeking to deepen their practice. There is plenty of room, therefore, for current meditators to attend, as well as for friends and family who may have expressed an interest. Please check the dates on the diary page and contact the Centre to book places.

Online: At the beginning of the year, meditators **Marc Cooper** and **Sally Passfield**, along with Paul and Sister Sara began to organise a

co-ordinated social media strategy. This has involved developing and managing a system whereby the Centre's news and event information, articles, quotes, photos, videos and audio files are uploaded across various social media platforms simultaneously. We now have a presence on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, AudioBoom and YouTube. To help spread the workload, **Rebecca Fisher** has also been recruited, along with Natalie Watson and **Glenda Brewer**. We now have an increasingly popular Facebook group called "Friends of the House of Inner Tranquillity" with over three hundred members. Sally, Natalie and Glenda make regular posts about the teaching and the Centre, uploading Dhamma talks, articles, audio and video to stimulate interest. The main Facebook page now has over four hundred 'likes' and is also regularly updated with event information, photos and inspirational quotes. One idea that has been mooted for the autumn is to host a series of Facebook 'live' events, wherein Paul and one of the students conduct a live Q&A video. Initially available live for members of the Facebook group, the recording of the event could then be made available on other platforms too. This is in addition to the videos

and audio lectures that are already being made available. The House of Inner Tranquillity YouTube channel now has over two hundred subscribers. The recent series on *paticca-samuppada* was well received and moving into the autumn Paul will be creating another series, this time focussing on *vipassana* meditation. We are also continuing to make the Aukana lectures available online. So far fifty-four talks have been uploaded with over thirteen thousand 'listens.'

We understand that some people are somewhat reticent about signing up to social media, especially given the concerns about how personal data is being used by the corporations that run them. Hopefully, everyone will be able to access most of the online material without having to personally subscribe if they do not want to. The feedback we have received over the last six months has shown us that there is a real thirst for the Buddha's teaching and genuine appreciation of the clear, pragmatic and inspiring way that the teaching is presented here at the Centre. Social media can often highlight the worst aspects of human behaviour. In making the teaching available to a more wide-spread audience online, we hope we can share some of its best aspects too. ■

BRADFORD ON AVON

HOUSE OF INNER TRANQUILLITY

RETREATS

6-Day Integrated Retreats

September 2-7

October 21-26

December 2-7

6-Day Silent Retreats

September 9-14

September 30-October 5

October 28-November 2

November 18-23

December 9-14

Weekend Retreats

September 20-22

October 11-13

November 8-10

TAPE & LECTURE EVENINGS

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

August 7	Lecture
August 14	Tape
August 21	Q&A
August 28	Tape
September 4	Lecture
September 11	Tape
September 18	Q&A
September 25	Tape
October 2	Lecture
October 9	Tape
October 16	Q&A
October 23	Tape
October 30	Lecture
November 6	Tape
November 13	Q&A
November 20	Tape
November 27	Lecture
December 4	Tape
December 11	Q&A
December 18	Lecture

DIARY

OPEN MEDITATIONS

Saturday mornings 10.15-11.15. The door will be open from 10.05am, August 10 - December 14 inc.

SATURDAY WORKSHOPS

10am to 3pm

August 31

September 28

November 16

SATELLITE GROUPS

Activities: Please contact

Toronto Canada: Jim Vuylsteke

Tel: +1-416-536-5698

AukanaToronto@sunyata.ca

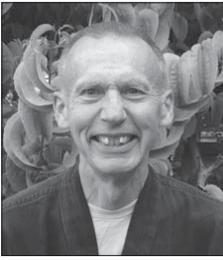
Open Day Review

Opposite are pictures from open day. This page shows helpers on the day before. From left to right and top to bottom:

Stephen Marsden, José Guerrero, Bev Howarth, Natalie Watson, Sue Hallissey, Ruby and Bonnie.

Photographs contributed by Anda Lutkevics, Marc Cooper, Becky Fisher, Maxine Harraway and Rebecca Skillman.





Extract from a Dhamma Talk with full time students

How is confusion related to self-concern and does each trigger the other?

Paul: What is the relationship between confusion and self-concern?

Student 1: I suppose one thing is, the self does not exist. That is what we are working to see, that it does not exist. That is the first confusion. As a result of the false belief in self, the emphasis changes and, instead of dealing with reality as it is in front of you, you seek to shore up the ego and protect the self, so that is another layer of confusion.

Paul: Yes. The one triggers the other, because once you have got that basic assumption of selfhood in place you are fundamentally confused. Acting out of that confusion then constantly reinforces the 'self' delusion and, thus, you are perpetuating and creating yet more confusion. They condition one another. Can anyone offer a definition of confusion?

Student 2: Not being able to perceive what is taking place. Everything just seems to be muddled and you cannot actually identify anything clearly.

Paul: You do not know what to think, you cannot really make heads

or tails of what is going on around you. Where does the self-concern come in?

Student 2: Self-concern comes in if you want to know, and you are finding you cannot know and, perhaps, you believe you should know.

Paul: Yes. How does that express itself?

Student 2: I suppose you have identified with the confusion and said, "that is me," and then made a comparison with what you would like it to be. As you do not appear to be that, so you get an unhappy state of affairs and painful feelings.

Paul: Okay. Any additions to that?

Student 3: You find it frustrating as well because you do not want it to be like that.

Paul: Self-concern is saying reality should be different than it is. Despite the fact that you are in a 'cloud of unknowing,' as it were, (*laughing*) there is still enough clarity to inwardly complain about it. You cannot make heads or tails of anything and the sense is that, by rights, you should be able to.

When I give a talk on a Wednesday I sometimes see confused faces staring at me. I can see the cogs turn-

ing and people trying to work things out. Is that a good idea when you are confused?

Student 4: No. It is speculation, another mental behaviour which is actually just going to reinforce doubt and confusion.

Paul: Yes. One of the big problems with confusion is the very attempt to get out of it. That attempt to get out of it is self-concern. It is based on the comparison between the reality of the moment and how you think you should be. This, however, only reinforces the sense of confusion.

What, then, is the way out of confusion? Is confusion permanent?

Student 3: No. If you set up mindfulness properly, at a certain point you will know what is going on.

Paul: Which is difficult when somebody is confused. What is the first most important step?

Student 3: To identify and note the confusion, to realise that it is there.

Paul: What about the comparison?

Student 3: Not to judge the confusion in any way.

Paul: But what if the comparison is already there?

Student 3: Well, you need to note that as well. (*laughter*)

Paul: Acknowledge the comparison and see the pain that believing in the comparison is producing. Accept that

there is confusion running at this time. That immediately takes some of the self-concern away. Dis-identify with it. Remind yourself that, "This is not me, this is not mine, this is not my 'self.'" This is a transient, conditioned mental event." It is like a weird cloud passing through the sky of the mind. It is like a fog descending. What is the best policy when you become aware that you are confused? What is it best to focus on?

Student 3: Bring your attention back to the body.

Paul: Why is that?

Student 3: When you are confused it is easier to be mindful of the body.

Paul: Yes. Our gross, physical experience is easier to detect than fleeting mental states. Get into something practical, even if it is just clearing up litter or sweeping leaves. Attend to the body and to your physical experience. Accept that there is confusion and, most importantly, stop trying to get out of the confusion. Allow the confusion to be there, then practise body mindfulness. What is the outcome of practising body mindfulness? What would you expect?

Student 1: More mental clarity.

Paul: Yes. If you tidy up a cupboard or something, you are actually involved in a kind of external version of what you really want to do, which is to clear

up the mind. Clear up a cupboard or dust a room and focus on your physical experience. As a result of that you do get more mental clarity. You start to recognise the general state of the mind and feelings. The content of the mind starts to become more clear too. Like any other mental state, confusion is transient and, with time, you will begin to come out of it. You will, in effect, come out of the confusion without having tried to come out of the confusion. I know it sounds paradoxical, but it is the case.

As the confusion lifts you gain a better idea of where you are. The thing to note then is the ceasing of confusion and the arising of clarity. That helps to reinforce the insight that the confusion did not last. You did not try to think your way out of the problem, therefore, you did not make yourself more confused. What I would like people to do on a Wednesday night if they are confused by anything I am saying, is to not try to work it out. (*laughing*) Just let it all flow up, around and through, because it is more important to see the transient nature of confusion than it is to try and solve the problem of confusion.

Student 1: That helps so much because I had automatically assumed you try and figure something out, which is making it worse.

Paul: Yes. It is very understandable that you try and think your way out of a pickle, but you just end up covered in more pickle. (*laughter*)

Student 3: I remember one meditator being told to keep his flat immaculately tidy because he was known to have stuff strewn all over the place, and of course it made a difference to the levels of confusion.

Paul: Yes, and it brings an all-round sense of well-being. As you do some dusting and vacuuming, and put things away, it does not take very long before your state of mind is completely different. In addition, you walk into that particular room and find that there is now an atmosphere of calm, rightness and order.

Keeping precepts will also help. All the precepts, of course, but, in this case, especially the fifth precept. It is best to avoid drink if you have a strong tendency towards confusion, because it is just asking for trouble, frankly. Mind-altering drugs as well, because they do distort perception. Anything like that which destroys clarity, inhibits intent and volition, and the efficient functioning of the mind are best to be avoided, especially for people with lots of confusion in their mental make-up. What else might help with reducing confusion?

Student 1: Wise reflection. I am not

sure if it is a good idea at the time of the confusion, but afterwards reflecting on how the period of confusion ended, just pondering on that.

Paul: Absolutely. Wise reflection is integral. What does that suggest is also necessary for reducing levels of confusion?

Student 3: Some studying to back it up.

Paul: Along with the study and the wise reflection, I would say the confused type needs to stay close to the teacher. The speculative side of confusion is what muddles everything when it comes to understanding the Buddha's teaching. Study, if done intelligently and at the right time, however, will be enormously helpful with defining states of mind and body. What else is required?

Student 2: The systematic setting up of mindfulness and reviewing.

Paul: Being really quite particular in setting up body mindfulness, specifically to ground oneself in real physical experience, is vital for the reasons that we have already stated. Yes, study; yes, wise reflection; yes, mindfulness, but specifically body mindfulness. Keep it simple. Do not try to think the confusion away. Instead, set up short periods of mindfulness with a brief retrospection included at the end each time. Anything else?

Student 4: Can it help to get to know the mental 'tone' of what confusion is? Rather than being afraid of it, you can stay with it and become more familiar with the state itself.

Paul: Yes, losing one's fear of it. Losing that belief that you have to do something about it. It is possible to experience a state of confusion fully. Of course, as soon as you are experiencing a state of confusion fully and saying "Yes, indeed, this is confusion" you are no longer that confused, are you? (*laughing*). That is true of all the hindrances. That is what I am trying to say, develop more mindfulness and clear comprehension of what is taking place, without trying to resolve anything. It is this that brings forth the wisdom that, ultimately, overcomes the problem of confusion. ■

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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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This newsletter is published twice a year by the Aukana Trust