



AUKANA

newsletter 7/2022

HOUSE OF INNER
TRANQUILLITY



"It is in the mind that is no longer grasping after anything in the world, that reality becomes apparent."

PAUL HARRIS

EDITORIAL

A recent survey has revealed that two thirds of British people are worried about being able to afford everyday essentials such as food and heating. As the true extent of the current 'cost of living crisis' is laid bare, more than half of Britons believe that their finances will worsen in the next twelve months. It is a concerning time for everybody. For those with the eyes to see, however, what has also been laid bare is the truth of the ultimately uncontrollable nature of conditioned existence.

There is no one reason for the current crisis. It is, rather, a concatenation of numerous and varying conditions, each influencing and reinforcing one another. For instance, the price of many everyday consumer goods jumped during the pandemic. Unable to go out, many people splashed out on household goods and home improvements instead. Manufacturers struggled to keep up with demand. This, in turn, led to shortages of materials such as plastic,

concrete, timber and steel, driving up prices. Global shipping companies have been overwhelmed by surging demand after the pandemic, meaning that retailers have had to pay a lot more to get those goods into stores. As a result, prices have been passed on to consumers.

There are also natural forces driving inflation. For instance, a poor harvest in Brazil due to severe drought led to a rise in the cost of coffee. Oil supplies took a hit from two hurricanes that passed through the Gulf of Mexico, also inflating prices. There are other influences as well, such as Britain's withdrawal from the European Union and the effects of the current conflict in Eastern Europe.

Moreover, issues such as the pandemic, climate change, geopolitical upheaval and armed conflict, do not come from nowhere. They, too, are the result of an intricate web of complex and, ultimately, uncontrollable conditions.

Whilst the cost of living is a worry

for everyone, it need not be quite as concerning for those who are committed to following the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path. We understand through this teaching that the world can never be entirely satisfying and dependable, precisely because of the transient, changeable nature of conditions. It is, however, possible to live in relative comfort irrespective of the state of the economy if we understand the rules that govern the relative world. The Buddha's teaching also points to there being another, transcendent, aspect to life, *nibbana*, the discovery of which means that we never again have to depend on the ever fluctuating fortunes of the world for our happiness, fulfilment and security.

Our actions, the Buddha stated, have results. Generosity yields wealth and, of course, generosity takes many forms. If we are willing to make the necessary 'spiritual investments', such as keeping precepts, giving freely to others and developing a friendly outlook, we will find that our faith in the benevolence of the universe will grow. If, further, we are willing to embrace the Buddha's advice about practising fewness of wishes and contentment with little, we will increasingly perceive our lives as being materially comfortable and secure.

It is, of course, understandable that people would wish for a higher standard of living. As the actor Michael Caine once quipped, "I have been rich and I have been poor. I know which one I prefer." For those, however, who act in accordance with Right View, it will seem more and more that life naturally provides us with what we need, irrespective of the economic state of the wider world.

Being content with little, making few demands on life and with a burgeoning faith in the benevolence of the universe, the mind will far more often feel happy, open, and free of worries. Such a mind turns easily to meditation and the mindful exploration of our immediate conscious experience. And it is right here, now, that we discover life's true bounty. With the mind uncluttered by our habitual mental preoccupations, we begin to see, truly, how transient, ungraspable and self-less all the components that go to make up each moment of existence really are. As our deep-rooted attachments to the world fall away, more and more we comprehend life for what it really is: an endlessly rich, beguiling mystery being rendered each moment in real-time, and all completely for free.

NEWS

People: In May, **Joe Rediger** arrived at the Meditation Centre for a two week stay. Joe lives in Arizona, USA. He had been interested in the Buddha's teaching for some time and was investigating possibilities for more involvement. Unable, however, to find anything locally that helped him deepen his practice, instead he looked online in search of guidance. Joe discovered the Centre's online content and found that he very much resonated with the way Paul presents the Buddha's teaching. Consequently, Joe became an active member of the Friends of the House of Inner Tranquillity Facebook group. Grateful to now have friends with whom he could discuss the teaching, Joe was encouraged by members of the group to have an online interview with Paul, so he contacted the Centre directly to arrange a video call. Joe says that he found that discussing his practice one-to-one with Paul helped his meditation practice enormously.

The natural next step was to arrange a trip to the UK to meet Paul in person and spend some time at the Centre to further develop his practice. He flew into London Heathrow airport, and travelled west to meet **Sally Passfield**, who had kindly offered to look after him before and after his stay at the Centre. Joe also met



with **Natalie Watson** and **Glenda Brewer** who, along with Sally, run the Facebook group.

Given that this was Joe's first ever trip to Europe, it must have been quite a culture shock arriving here. Jet lag aside, however, Joe took to life in the disciplined environment of a dedicated Buddhist meditation retreat centre as though 'to the manor born.' Readily adapting to the Centre's daily routines, he made the most of the opportunity to practice so much meditation.

Much of Joe's work time in the afternoon was spent in the garden. Swapping the searing desert heat for our mild spring, he very much enjoyed the lush greenness and variety of vegetation, conditions unknown in his arid, dusty part of Arizona. Joe made sure to take plenty of photographs of the unfamiliar flowers and creatures that he encountered for the first time to share with his mum.

For two weeks Joe got to experience what it is really like to live life as a full time recluse in a Buddhist community. The same opportunity for extended stays at the Centre exists for other students too. A long stay provides plenty of time and space for the study and practice of the Buddha's teaching, as well as developing one's spiritual faculties through service to the Sangha. It offers too, the chance to attend the weekly Dhamma Talks with Paul and receive personal instruction from someone who has completed the training. It is a rare opportunity, indeed.

Joe has posted a very kind and warm-hearted review of his visit on the Friends of HoT Facebook page which is well worth a read. He says he found the time in the UK extremely beneficial to his practice and has developed strong bonds with his fellow meditators. We look forward to him visiting again.

Garden: An odd message was left on the Trust's answerphone on the morning of Monday 13 June. An elderly lady said that she had a garden statue of Pan and would like to return it to its rightful owner.

Thirty or so years ago, a 70 centimetre high stone statue of seated Pan – a Greek mythical god, half goat and half man – was stolen from the far end of the Centre's garden adjacent to the road. As a consequence, a chicken-wire fence was erected behind the juvenile *Leylandii* hedge to ensure that there were no further intrusions. The whereabouts of the statue, however, never came to light and, over the years, the matter was all but forgotten.

We called the lady back who explained what happened in more detail. In the local paper there had been an appeal for information regarding the return of another statue of Pan that had recently been stolen. This appeal had jogged the lady's conscience and prompted her into action. Apparently, a long time ago the stone statue of Pan had mysteriously turned up on her doorstep. The statue had since sustained some damage, losing one of its feet, but the lady was keen to restore the statue to its original home and asked that someone collect it.

Brother Nigel was the only one at the Centre who would recognise the

statue. Accompanied by **David Gilbert** and **Jason Rebello**, he visited the lady, whose nephew happened to be visiting. In chatting with the lady and her nephew there was some reminiscing about one particularly boisterous, inebriated evening many years ago. Brother Nigel confirmed the identity of the statue. It was loaded into the Trust's car and returned to the Centre after its long absence. It has found a new home in the bed opposite the bottom of the stairs down to the vegetable plot. It is fixed to a concrete plinth raising it above the ground and surrounding plants and is hidden from the view of the gardens below by a screen of shrubs.

Maintenance: Recently our regular roofer **Mr. Tripp** covered the coping stones on the roof above the annex with sheets of lead to extend their functional life as they were crumbling away at the edges. One very windy night earlier in the year the coping stones received a battering. The wind had been so strong that it lifted the edges of the lead up. Mr. Tripp investigated and tamped down the lead to its original position. He commented that it was fortunate that he had secured the lead with nails at either end, otherwise it would have blown off altogether.

A part of the fascia on the garden

side of no. 10 came away during a night of heavy rain. The guttering and netting tacked to the fascia to prevent jackdaws nesting under the eaves became twisted as a result and the structure was hanging precariously adrift from the building. Mr. Tripp was called in to take a look and arranged for scaffolding to be erected to enable closer inspection to assess the damage and for repair work to be carried out.

The fascia had been repainted when the roof was replaced a few years ago as the wood was sound and in good condition. Upon inspection of the damage it became apparent that the fascia had been poorly fitted originally. The screws used to secure it were too short and there had not been enough purchase for them to keep the fascia secure. The damage is currently being repaired.

Simon Prudames who painted the Shrine Room in 2020 was due to repaint the doors, windows, and guttering at the back of no. 8. With some difficulty, he had arranged for scaffolding to be erected for access to the upper windows and chimney. This would enable him to do all the painting safely, comfortably and quickly. A builder was also due to inspect the chimney and walls and repoint them to assist with eliminating the damp problem in no. 8.

Unfortunately the scaffolders pulled out at short notice due to other commitments and no replacement scaffolders could be found until much later in the year. As the scaffolding has not been erected the builder was unable to do his work so the damp issue will be addressed later.

Simon had to rethink his approach. He has started work, accompanied by a colleague, on the ground floor of the building. When he moves to the two upper floors he will take the windows out to paint them and paint the frames from the inside of the building. Unfortunately he is now unable to repaint the guttering and carry out maintenance work above the glass outhouse.

When weather permitted Brother Nigel completed the outhouse work with the help of day students Jason Rebello and **Rebecca Skillman**. This is an awkward site to access and involved setting a short ladder at precarious angles over the glass roof. Two people were required to complete the job safely as one of them had to support the ladder at the bottom while the other worked at the top.

Online: Our online presence continues to thrive and, as Joe Rediger's recent stay at the Centre demonstrates, is having a beneficial impact. We now livestream Wednesday evening

talks and Q&As on our Facebook page. Recordings of these can also be watched subsequently and can be found clicking the 'Videos' tab on the main House of Inner Tranquillity page.

We will continue to offer livestreams with Paul on Monday nights when there is no other live event or retreat that week. Please be sure to keep an eye out for reminders of dates posted on our website and Facebook pages. Sally, Natalie and Glenda continue to do a sterling job in creating content for the Facebook group, posting chapters from the Aukana books and posing questions to stimulate dialogue between members.

Although we haven't posted anything on our YouTube channel recently don't forget that there is plenty of teaching available there. This includes complete video series' on Vipassana, Condition-dependent Origination and the Divine Abidings, as well as guided meditations and Dhamma talks. Moving forward we intend to create more content for YouTube with improved production values. Although such videos are time consuming to produce, they have immense value in helping people discover the Buddha's teaching and, especially, the way it is presented at the House of Inner Tranquillity.

BRADFORD ON AVON

HOUSE OF INNER TRANQUILLITY

RETREATS

6-Day Integrated Retreats

September 5-10
November 21-26

6-Day Silent Retreats

August 8-13
August 22-27
October 17-22
October 31-November 5
December 5-10

Weekend Retreats

September 16-18
November 11-13

TAPE & LECTURE EVENINGS

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

August 3	Lecture
August 10	Tape
August 17	Q&A
August 24	Tape
August 31	Lecture
September 7	Tape
September 14	Q&A
September 21	Tape
September 28	Lecture
October 5	Tape
October 12	Q&A
October 19	Tape
October 26	Lecture
November 2	Tape
November 9	Q&A
November 16	Tape
November 23	Tape
November 30	Lecture
December 7	Tape
December 14	Q&A

OPEN MEDITATIONS

Saturday mornings 10.15-11.15. The door will be open from 10.05am, August 6 - December 10 inc.

**HoIT FACEBOOK PAGE
LIVESTREAMS**

Monday evenings 7.30.
Provisional dates:
September 19, November 14

SATURDAY WORKSHOP

10am to 3pm
September 3, October 15

SATELLITE GROUPS

Activities: Please contact
Toronto Canada: Jim Vuylsteke
Tel: +1-416-536-5698
AukanaToronto@sunyata.ca

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A Talk by Jason Rebello

The following article was written by long-standing meditator Jason Rebello for the Wesak evening held in May this year.

We are all here today to celebrate Wesak, which is the day that the Buddha was born, became enlightened and died. It is celebrated all around the world by Buddhists.

In South Korea, a hundred thousand people, each holding a glowing lantern, parade the streets to honour the Buddha and his teachings. This is known as the lotus lantern festival. After this, thousands of wish lanterns are released into the sky. Apparently, it is an amazing spectacle, with many people getting together to honour and celebrate the Buddha and his teachings. Then, after that, all the crowds gather outside the temple to look at Buddhist art and eat delicious food.

Meanwhile, a meditator is on his first week-long retreat. He had been told by a friend that when he goes for his interview he should kneel before the teacher respectfully and then present a gift. This all goes to plan in the first interview, but in the second interview, the student suddenly realises that he has only brought one

gift. What should he do in the second interview? Was he supposed to have a gift for each interview? He was now confused as to what to do next.

Unfortunately for the meditator, his last minute decision to just kneel before the teacher without actually having a gift, turned out to be the wrong move. This became quickly apparent when, after kneeling down, way too much time elapsed with no one saying anything. Then, as the meditator had realised his mistake, kneeling there, cringing, the words, "Is there a problem?" emanated from his teacher, who was genuinely perplexed as to why the meditator was just kneeling there, head down, and not saying anything. The response, "My friend told me to do it" arose in the student's mind, but that was rejected, and when nothing else sensible came up, the meditator simply got up and sat down, feeling very stupid. In his attempt to honour the Buddha and his teachings, he had slightly got the wrong end of the stick.

In another part of the world, a meditator needed some milk from the fridge. Because of her dedication to the Buddha's teaching, she put in the volition to notice all the component parts of the activity. The intention to

get up from the chair, the feeling of the legs bending. The sensations of the soles of her feet as she walked to the fridge. The intention to open the fridge door, the sound of the door popping open, the feeling of pressure as her hand contacted the hard metal surface and cold sensation as the fridge door opened. After the milk had been poured into her tea, she took a moment to reflect.

Wisely reflecting on all those experiences, she noticed that she had not labelled any of the component parts as “the entity of myself, doing all these things”. In that series of experiences, it was clear to her that it was true what the Buddha’s teaching had been pointing out. There is in reality, no self-entity. It is not that she had found a “not-self”, more, that the self she had assumed to be there, was clearly not actually a component part of getting milk from the fridge. A bit like overcoming the belief in Santa Claus. You don’t need to find a “non-Santa Claus” to prove he is imaginary. It is just at some point, you notice that no-one has ever found him and you become satisfied that the reason why is that he does not actually exist. Her wise reflection had strengthened her understanding of the Buddha’s teaching.

So out of these three different approaches to honour the Buddha’s

teachings, I am pretty confident the Buddha would be most pleased with the third meditator as she was genuinely doing her best to follow the training and developing insight into the nature of her experience in a very practical way.

Attending the meeting tonight, and, indeed, every effort we make in the direction of increasing our understanding of the Buddha’s teaching adds up. It is never wasted. No matter how small or momentary. And when all the steady efforts come to fruition, we will be able to apprehend reality in new and more profound ways than we currently can. Eventually, if we stick with it, and do much wise reflection and practice mindfulness, at some point in one of our lives, maybe even this one, we will come to the end of suffering. It is inevitable as long as we stick with the training.

So, how about honouring the Buddha and his teaching on this auspicious Wesak celebration by following Paul’s simple, but powerful instruction “to rest content in the moment, and label whatever arises and passes away.” Then we will be truly devoting ourselves in the best possible way to the endeavour of coming to that wonderful state of affairs known as Enlightenment or freedom from all psychological suffering.

Extract from a Dhamma Talk with full time students

Question: What are the benefits of service to others? How can it go wrong? How does it go right?

Paul: What do we mean by service?

Student One: It means to give time and energy to help others and, I would say, to do it willingly and happily. Then everybody benefits.

Paul: Good. Are there any other aspects to what service is?

Student Two: The giving demands something of you. You have to reduce your own selfishness and your personal desires to offer assistance to others, even if it may not necessarily be how you feel.

Paul: Yes. There is also the case where it is something you either find very easy or very enjoyable and it is not, therefore, taxing. It is, however, still energy being given in service to others and so there is an expenditure of some kind or other.

What are some of the benefits of service, then?

Student Three: It helps to counteract depression, turning inwards and negativity. You are having to reduce your self-concern because you are giving to someone else and looking outwards.

Paul: Yes, it is emotionally and psychologically healthy to do so. Service will help to counteract the tendency to become nihilistic, in the sense of believing that there is no purpose to life and no reason to be alive. That is an increasingly common attitude among people in this 'post-modern' society, where people are under the impression there is no overarching truth to life. It is a very dangerous attitude which does lead towards extreme negativity and depression.

We all need a sense of meaning, purpose and direction in life. That is why we have the Noble Eightfold Path. That is why the Buddha laid down a direction, even though we know that, as we progress, more and more it becomes just about being in the here and now. It is not about the future. But, still, there is this sense of having a real sense of purpose and direction.

For people to have something outside of themselves, towards which they can direct themselves and act in the interest of other people, is extremely beneficial, emotionally and psychologically. That is a crucial aspect of service.

Student One: I was going to say one of the main benefits of service is

keeping the teachings alive. It is only because the monks had the service of people around them, giving them food, for instance, and looking out for them, giving them land for monasteries and so on, that the Sangha could thrive and keep the teachings alive throughout the last thousands of years.

Paul: Coming from a deep sense of compassion, isn't it? Having realised through personal experience the benefits of following the Buddha's path, they wanted to ensure that other beings have that same opportunity to discover the teachings themselves.

All in all, then, we are saying that service is a good idea. Even at the level of a person who is lonely and depressed deciding to go out and help out at a local charity shop or joining a forest preservation group or clearing stuff out of the canal. Taking yourself out of yourself through a little bit of community service, you end up meeting people that you have something in common with and, lo and behold, you have some friends.

Student One: Often people after they retire do lots of service. It helps keep them alive and keeps them feeling useful. They are getting old, but they have a meaningful purpose to life and it keeps their faculties going and so on.

Paul: Yes, I think that's absolutely the case. I was in the company of a couple of octogenarians recently. They are both very committed Christians. Their bodies are failing them limb by limb, organ by organ, sense by sense. It is all falling to bits, as it would do when you are in your mid-eighties. Spiritually, however, they are both fine. They have lived lives devoted to service towards their communities and their Church and to the people around them. Over time, clearly, it embeds an outlook which is extremely positive and healthy.

Student One: You could say it is mundane wisdom, couldn't you?

Paul: The way to heaven, yes. So, there we have some of the benefits of service to others. I think it is to be highly recommended. How does it go wrong?

Student One: One way is if somebody starts putting themselves in a superior position. Conceit can arise.

Paul: Because they are doing the service, they compare themselves favourably with others?

Student One: Yes, it makes them think they are special.

Paul: Any other drawbacks?

Student Two: The attitude behind what you are doing counts for a lot. I think you need to reflect wisely on the fact that you are giving a gift of serv-

ice. You could actually just dismiss it and not acknowledge that it is a good thing that you are doing.

Paul: It becomes performance by rote and, without the overarching right view, it is just a job. It is helpful to recognise that it is a generous act. It magnifies the act as a 'spiritual' act. It magnifies the beneficial effects, because there is more conscious awareness of what you are doing and the intentions behind it. That is a good thing. Where it goes wrong, however, is if we then tack on the conceit, "... and doesn't that make me superior."

One of the prime issues with service to others is that it becomes a source of spiritual pride. It can so easily engender virtue-signalling, wherein we want everyone else to know just quite how nice and spiritual and brilliant we are being. This is to miss the point completely. The idea is to reduce levels of self-concern, not raise them up to extraordinary heights.

What is the right spiritual attitude with regard to service to others?

Student One: Love. Serve from an attitude of loving-kindness. And wisdom.

Paul: Yes, and what is the wisdom?

Student One: The wisdom is the understanding of the benefits of the service to everybody.

Paul: But what is motivating any one of us? What motivated me was not your enlightenment. With the greatest wish in the world, that was not what motivated me. I wanted to be free of suffering. That is what was motivating me. It did, however, make absolute perfect sense that one way you undercut the tendency towards self-concern was through service. Being a monk meant not having a choice. I had to do what I was asked to do. It meant serving the community with the right spiritual attitude. That is to say, "I will do the best job I can, even if it is cleaning this loo. I will do as impeccable a job as I can. I will make mistakes and I won't mind being corrected. I will do that because I know, ultimately, it is for my own benefit."

Reducing self-concern through service to others is very healthy. You actually feel more alive, more awake, less depressed, more joyful and more open as a result. That helps your insight meditation. The clarity and calm that comes through service enables you to deepen your comprehension of the three characteristics, of transience, suffering and non-self.

When I say that what motivated me was not your enlightenment but my own, that is true. Of course, I care. What I mean is, there was nothing I could do in that regard, you have

to sort that out. There was only one person I was ever going to be able to set free.

Is that love? I am not overly idealistic about these things. I know you benefit in all kinds of ways through me serving the community. I also know, however, that such service is helping me walk the path to freedom.

Student Three: I'm thinking that it would generate love in the mind of the giver when you are serving others. If you are doing it with the best intentions, you would feel love going out to people around you.

Paul: That is nice, but it isn't the most important thing.

Student Three: No. It is a by-product.

Paul: Is, ultimately, the Buddhist path all about love? No, in the final analysis, it is about understanding. As a by-product of real understanding, there is real love. We are all different, however, and the way love expresses itself is a very difficult thing to quantify.

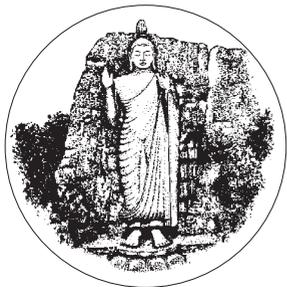
Student Three: An occasion I remember, that struck me, that I put down to love, was very early on here. There were lots of people on retreat and we would stand out of each other's way, leaving doors open for one another. You were considering your fellow meditator with that just simple act of leaving the door open

and standing aside, and it felt loving.

Paul: That is fine. What you feel is what you feel. Many students have the tendency to magnify the love aspect, whereas, in actual fact, what they really need to be magnifying is insight-wisdom. The loving attitude is there as part of walking the path. It is implicit in the fact that you keep precepts, are of service to others and regularly practice *metta*. For me, I understood that through service I could generate healthy, beautiful states of mind. I also knew, however, that it was only the transcendent understanding that comes through insight meditation that would ultimately set me free. The whole system of Buddha-dhamma works perfectly and, in that regard, the service aspect works as a vital support to the generation of supra-mundane wisdom.

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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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