



AUKANA

*newsletter* 7/2023

HOUSE OF INNER  
TRANQUILLITY



*"If you believe that your happiness is dependent on the state of the world, then you will never be happy. You will never be at peace. When you accept responsibility for your suffering, and you learn to deal with it by following the Buddha's teaching, you can come to be properly happy. There comes to be a deep, abiding contentment with what is. You are no longer at war with life."*

PAUL HARRIS

## EDITORIAL

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The House of Inner Tranquillity was the brainchild of Alan and Jacqui James. These two spiritual pioneers devoted themselves wholeheartedly to following the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path to its conclusion. It is quite something to consider that Alan and Jacqui actually realised *nibbana* together, at the self-same moment. What a rarity! And it is our rare and good fortune that they subsequently decided to commit their lives to helping others find that same freedom from suffering.

Our Centre was created, therefore, on the fundamental principle that the Buddha's teaching is true. Enlightenment, the third of the Four Noble Truths, is real. The Noble Eightfold Path works. The training in *vipassana*, insight-wisdom meditation, works. Alan and Jacqui's influence is still being felt today. The House of Inner

Tranquillity continues to provide the teaching of the Buddha in its entirety. Following the path diligently, and under proper guidance, there are others, too, who have discovered *nibbana*, directly, for themselves.

To follow the Path, however, is not at all straightforward. There are many potential traps and pitfalls. It is no easy matter to overcome the myriad wrong views, thoughts and perceptions that keep people mired in delusion and suffering. We cannot do it alone. We need help. We need the Sangha.

The Buddhist Sangha is a true refuge. The community gives students the opportunity to learn and practise in a friendly and safe environment. Not everyone shares the belief that enlightenment is a real thing. Sometimes family-members or friends can even be actively opposed to such

ideas. This can be off-putting for a student, causing doubt to arise in the teaching which is, in reality, something to be deeply treasured. We need to be able to regularly step into an environment where we are among like-minded people. What helps to create such a harmonious atmosphere is that we share the same overarching philosophy. Namely, that we are willing to take ownership for our suffering and its causes. In doing so, we grant ourselves the power to bring suffering to an end.

This is why the teacher talks to people before they begin attending the group. Those with differing agendas, whatever they may be, are encouraged to find the people and places that more accurately reflect their values. This “firewall” helps tremendously in ensuring that the group as a whole remains focused and committed.

One of the biggest changes over recent years has been the emergence of our online community. Whether it is via our YouTube channel or our Facebook group, people further afield are now able to access Buddhadharma as taught at the House of Inner Tranquillity. While nothing beats being physically present at the Centre, we nonetheless consider the online community to be an essential part of

our ever-evolving Sangha. This spring we began fortnightly Monday evening Zoom meetings. It has been lovely to be able to share the online space with students from such far-flung places as the United States, Canada, Sweden, France and the Netherlands. This new way for people to participate and be a part of the Sangha has proven to be a priceless addition.

The world appears to be in quite a mess at the moment and there is much by way of suffering. There is a way out of all such heartache and the Buddha’s compassionate teaching shows us that way. To have such a Centre as ours, offering the whole of the Buddha’s teaching is a rare treasure. Our community will stand firm in these difficult times, ensuring that others will have the chance to walk the path and realise *nibbana* for themselves, just as did Alan and Jacqui, and just as many others have done since. ■

#### DATA PROTECTION ACT

*The mailing list used for the House of Inner Tranquillity Newsletter is maintained on computer. If you object to your record being kept on our computer file, please write to us and we will remove it.*

## NEWS

**Maintenance:** This spring saw some much-needed maintenance of no. 8 Masons Lane. For a long time there have been damp problems on the floor and walls, particularly in the garden room. It had been suspected that the wooden floor was laid directly onto the ground. It was showing clear signs of rot. Damp patches also mysteriously appeared on the walls.

**Tom Hammond** was asked to investigate and resolve the damp issues by renovating the floor, stripping the wallpaper and redecorating. Tom had previously helped out our decorator **Simon Prudames**. This time the boot was on the other foot as Simon was assisting Tom.



*Tom and Simon*

The extent of the problem was revealed when they started to take up the floor boards. The joists supporting the boards were resting on rubble. Both boards and joists turned out to be rotten. As these were being removed some coins from the 1980's

were found near the door. This, apparently, is an old tradition, a way to ward off evil spirits.

Tom and Simon removed some thirty black bin bags worth of rubble. It was back breaking work, but this cleared the way for rebuilding the floor. Carefully aligned bricks were positioned on concrete to support the joists. Noggins were fitted to brace the joists and new floor boards fitted. Vent holes were drilled through the thick walls below floor level and decorative brass vents were fitted around the floor to ensure good circulation of air.

Next, the walls were stripped of wallpaper in order to investigate the damp problem. Mysteriously, the damp was showing through in oddly unconnected areas. It was not at all obvious what the source of the problem was. Working on a hunch, Simon meticulously cleaned one area of damp on the wall, while another area was left just stripped. He then used a heater to help dry out both areas. The following day it became clear that the well-cleaned area remained dry but the other area showed new signs of damp. Simon realised that the cause of the damp was the old wallpaper paste. Apparently, as it ages it becomes hydroscopic, meaning that it starts to absorb water from the atmosphere. With the mystery solved, the

walls were thoroughly cleaned and painted with several coats of a damp resistant paint.

To further assist in eliminating damp some external changes were also necessary. The soil in the border abutting the outside wall was removed to a distance of half a meter or so. A lean-to on the gable end wall of the house was removed as there was the potential for rain to permeate where it was attached. This wall was meant to be repointed. For many years, however, it has been home to masonry bees that burrow into the soft bath stone. As the holes and 'galleries' the bees create were deemed not to be a cause of damp getting in, it was decided to leave them in peace.

With the new floor in place and the damp issues resolved it was time to redecorate. The walls were painted in a fresh, clean pale grey. The alcoves on either side of the chimney breast were cleaned and left in their original bare sandstone state. New carpet, curtains and furnishings will bring a whole new feel to the room that can once again be used for its intended purpose as a comfortable lounge.

Simon has kindly provided photos that he had taken during the course of the work. A selection are shown on page 10.

**Garden:** Work on the leaking middle pond in the Japanese garden began

early in the spring, with **Brother Nigel** emptying it ready for repair and repainting. Unfortunately, because of the protracted period of rainy weather, it was several weeks before the work could be carried out. The pond was given its second coat of paint just a week before Open Day. It was filled and left overnight to check there were no leaks. Thankfully it was sound and we were able to have the cascading water-course working on the day itself.

The main lawn outside the Shrine Room and the bottom of no. 8 lawn were both in need of some tender loving care. There was a great deal of work required to remove the old turf and prepare the ground ready for reseeding. The grass seed was mixed with sand to get an even distribution when it was scattered. To help with germination, the ground was covered with clear polythene sheeting for three weeks. The shoots began to appear and grew to a few centimetres in length. The sheets were then removed and the grass allowed to grow for a few weeks until its first cut. The contrast between the new grass and old is very noticeable, especially in no. 8 garden.

Some of the prickly plants in the gravel area next to the vegetable plot suffered from the prolonged cold spell early in the year. There were a number of casualties. Not so the

two large *Yuccas* at the back of the bed, however. One sent out three magnificent plump flower spikes in early June. Next to this was another *Yucca* that had sent out a single tall spike which has yet to fully flower. The spike was measured by Brother Nigel at 4 metres on 6th July. The common name for this flower is Lord's Candle.



*Brother Nigel*

Brother Nigel is the mastermind behind the grounds at the Meditation Centre which are extensive and full of a fascinating variety of plants. These take much time and effort to maintain, and extra care is taken so they look their best for Open Day. Thank you to all the day students and everyone who

volunteered their services, helping in the gardens and around the properties, on the approach to Open Day.

**Open Day:** The weather was kind, with sunshine and a pleasant cool breeze for our Open Day on Sunday 25th June. The day was a very happy one. It was great to see so many friends old and new, with many former members of the group coming to visit. Traditionally, the Open Day is intended as an opportunity for members of the community to invite friends and family along to show them around. These days, it also gives members of our online Sangha a chance to visit the place they hear and read so much about, and to meet everyone in person. The attendance was over two hundred this year, which is unusually high. We discovered that the day coincided with the town's Secret Garden event, when some homeowners in Bradford on Avon open their gardens to the public. It seems a fair few garden enthusiasts, thinking we were part of that event, had a good look round our grounds too, contributing to the high attendance.

Members were extremely generous in donating cakes, many of them home made. There was a brisk trade at the tea stall, with several people claiming it was the best cake they had ever tasted. The garden enthusiasts visiting bought many plants,

all propagated from the garden. The shop excelled in selling Paul's book 'Postcards from Beyond' and Buddha statues.

Many meditators and some of their family members helped out on the day as well as in the lead up to Open Day. Thank you to all of you who contributed and helped to make the day so enjoyable for everyone.

We asked **Marc Cooper** to take some photographs of the day, which we have included on page 11 along with some quotes and comments from members of the community on page 10.

**Online:** This season, based on some feedback from members of the group, we decided to begin fortnightly Monday evening meetings via Zoom, the video conferencing platform. These were to replace the Facebook livestreams from the Shrine Room on Wednesdays. We were never particularly happy with the quality of these streams, certainly considering the amount of effort that was required to make them happen. Also, the format didn't really allow much interaction for those watching online. The Monday Zoom meetings resolve all these issues. It is much easier to set up, and for people to join and take an active part in. The event follows a similar format to the regular House of Inner Tranquillity meetings. We have a brief

pre-meditation talk, followed by a half hour 'group' meditation. There are breakout rooms giving everyone who attends the chance to socialise and then a Q&A session with Paul.

The response to this development has been very encouraging. Numbers attending the online event are comparable to those attending the Wednesday meetings at the Centre. Importantly, however, the majority of people present are those who, because they live so far from Bradford on Avon, would otherwise be denied this kind of involvement. Obviously meetings in cyberspace cannot really compare to being physically present at the Centre. Yet, the meetings are proving to be a lifeline for those for whom the Dhamma is so important, especially in the way it is taught here.

We will, of course, be resuming Monday online meetings for the autumn season. Dates are on the Diary page of this newsletter. We also send out email reminders for the events. Please let us know if you would like to be added to the email list. We would encourage everyone, especially those who live at a distance, to make the commitment to regularly attend and support these events. There is also the opportunity to serve. If you have a reliable internet connection and would like the chance to host the Zoom meeting, you are very welcome to contact the Centre. ■

# BRADFORD ON AVON

HOUSE OF INNER TRANQUILLITY

## RETREATS

### 6-Day Integrated Retreats

September 4-9

October 23-28

### 6-Day Silent Retreats

August 21-26

September 25-30

October 9-14

November 13-18

November 27-December 2

December 11-16

### Weekend Retreats

August 11-13

September 15-17

November 3-5

## TAPE & LECTURE EVENINGS

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

August 9	<b>Lecture</b>
August 16	Tape
August 23	<b>Q&amp;A</b>
August 30	Tape
September 6	<b>Lecture</b>
September 13	Tape
September 20	<b>Q&amp;A</b>
September 27	Tape
October 4	<b>Lecture</b>
October 11	Tape
October 18	Tape
October 25	<b>Q&amp;A</b>
November 1	Tape
November 8	<b>Lecture</b>
November 15	Tape
November 22	<b>Q&amp;A</b>
November 29	Tape
December 6	<b>Lecture</b>
December 13	Tape
December 20	<b>Q&amp;A</b>

## OPEN MEDITATIONS

Saturday mornings 10.15-11.15. The door will be open from 10.05am, August 11 - December 16 inc.



## **MONDAY ONLINE MEETINGS**

**Evening starts 7.30pm**

August 14, 28,

September 11, 25,

October 9, 30,

November 13, 27,

December 11

## **SATURDAY WORKSHOPS**

**10am to 2pm**

September 2,

October 7

## **SATELLITE GROUPS**

**Toronto Canada**

Please contact: Jim Vuylsteke

Tel: +1-416-571-4932

Web site: [www.sunyata.ca](http://www.sunyata.ca)

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Work in progress on no. 8

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## OPEN DAY – COMMENTS FROM VISITORS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

**Jeremy Langley:** Open day is a wonderful opportunity to share the beautiful and tranquil grounds and buildings of the Aukana Trust with friends and family.

**Keith Richardson:** Family and friends who do not attend the Centre only have our description to go on and so it is particularly useful to be able to let them see the Centre for themselves and where we disappear to on retreats!

**Sally Passfield:** Open day is a rare opportunity to meet up with friends from our facebook group whom we have not met in person before.

**Natalie Watson:** The visitors who were experiencing their first time to our Centre, remarked on its peace. It was a joy to see so many dear, familiar faces.

**Sarah Hoban:** It was a pleasure to attend the Open Day with my family. My family appreciated talking with members of the Centre. My children particularly enjoyed the pond and large exotic plants!

**Julia Barton:** I had invited a good friend who experienced the warmth, energy and friendliness of all those whom she met. She left with a real sense of peace and well-being, recognising how blessed we all are to have access to such a unique place.





## Extract from a Dhamma Talk with full time students

**What would be accurate labels for internal body sensations, such as subtle twinges in the back or legs, or butterflies in the stomach or the sensation of fear in the stomach?**

**Paul:** Good question. Do we know our “ultimates”? Do we know, firstly, which of the aggregates we are describing here?

**Student1:** Material, the body.

**Paul:** Materiality, good. And more specifically within that aggregate?

**Student1:** The tactile.

**Paul:** The tactile sense, okay. And within the tactile sense?

**Student1:** I thought it was pressure.

**Paul:** Traditionally Buddhism uses the terms, earth, air, fire and water to describe the constituent elements in a moment of tactile experience. We could also say extension, motion, temperature and cohesion. Any tactile sensation contains elements of those four, three of which are explicitly evident, the fourth, cohesion, the water element, which is inferred.

The earth element, the element of extension, will be the degree of hardness or softness experienced. The motion element is the distending quality, the degree of pressure being

exerted. The temperature element is the degree of heat or coldness, the radiating quality of the tactile sensation. The cohesion or water element is the cohering quality that binds the other three elements together. Strictly speaking the element of cohesion can only be inferred because consciousness can only know one object at a time. The question is asking, “Well, how do I note these tactile sensations?”

To clarify things, it helps to recognise the difference between the mental aggregates and the materiality aggregate in the experience. In the case of something like butterflies in the stomach just before you give a talk, what are the mental aspects of that experience?

**Student1:** I think it is an unpleasant feeling.

**Paul:** Good. And that belongs to the aggregate of feeling. What else is there? Using the example of just before you go in to give a talk.

**Student1:** Fear.

**Paul:** Fear would belong to which of the aggregates?

**Student1:** Mental formations.

**Paul:** Excellent. There will also be perceptions arising. The perception

might be, for instance, “butterflies in the stomach”. You have to clearly differentiate between the physical and mental components and this clarification then helps with labelling the internal bodily sensations.

What is a subtle twinge in the back or legs in terms of the aggregate of materiality? If you look at the experience repeatedly, you see that it is a combination of hardness, softness, motion, pressure and temperature. You could also include things like sharpness or dullness, although that is shading into the territory of the aggregate of perception. That is how you label the internal bodily sensations. You look quizzical...

**Student1**: I was just thinking of the difference of the butterflies and the twinge.

**Paul**: They are conventional labels. What is actually being experienced?

**Student1**: What I mean is, I have many examples of the fear and I was just thinking what was there that was mental in the experience of the twinge. I suppose it is the same thing, isn't it?

**Paul**: I think you might just be mixing ultimate and conventional levels. In purely ultimate terms, there is no “twinge” and no “back” or “leg.” The components that make up all conscious experiences must fall within the

five aggregates, right? It is, therefore, a question of being willing to explore, purely in terms of the ultimate level, in terms of the aggregates. You set aside the idea of “butterflies in the stomach” as being the aggregate of perception and you can then ask, “What else is there?”

For instance, anxiety. You mindfully acknowledge the anxiety and, yes, you see if you can redress the balance of the mind. This could be reflecting on reasons to be grateful or what you can appreciate about life. All well and good, but what about going further and actually mindfully “diving” into the experience? What about diving into the discomfort of it, in order to explode your attachment to it, to explode the belief that there is somehow something wrong? The idea being to explore the experience to such an extent that you actually see that it is nothing but impersonal aggregates arising and passing away? It is all just waves in a sea of phenomena. There is tremendous power in seeing it in this way. Mindfully deconstructing the experience down into its component parts is far, far better than just sitting timorously on the side hoping the anxiety goes away. What happens when you explore reality in this way? What happens if you acknowledge that there is anxiety and then choose

to plunge your attention deeply into that experience on the physical level? What will you see? What will happen?

**Student1**: I think, often, it is that you discover that there is nothing there. You can't see it any more, it is not there.

**Paul**: It is empty. You push through the "shell" of the concept. In this case, the concept of "butterflies in the stomach." Everyone gets nervous before they speak publicly, it is perfectly normal. As meditators, however, the onus is on wanting to investigate the experience. You are, therefore, not in denial of the anxiety. You are not trying to get rid of it. You are not playing with it. Instead, you choose to dive into the physical aspect of the experience to see what is really there. You plunge, in a manner of speaking, "through" the conceptual "shell" of this experience of anxiety and you go deeply into it. You observe closely those strange "watery" sensations we call anxiety. The moment you explode that conceptual shell and go through, what is left? A few bits of pressure, temperature, movement, hardness, softness, sharpness, dullness, which are never the same for two moments. You start to see that it is nothing more than an endless flux of momentary points creating an apparent field of scintillation. Nothing but points,

arising and passing away. And for each one of those points, there is a brief moment of conscious knowing, which arises with it, apprehends it and ceases with it.

The choice was to go into that experience, to break through the conceptual shell just by looking at it more closely, with more intent and with more purpose. And what happens? You discover there is nothing there! Nothing solid, nothing that you need to fix. Then, as you come out of that experience, you ask, "Where has the anxiety gone?" If you are not ignoring such states, you just see them for what they are and you understand that they do not perpetuate. They only appear to perpetuate because of grasping after the concept of them. In reality they do not persist through time.

Can you see the difference between just playing with it as opposed to going really deeply into it?

**Student1**: Yes, that breaking through the conceptual "shell" really makes sense to me.

**Paul**: You can do this with any experience. The birds singing in the garden, for instance. In that moment, we create this mental fixation, this idea of "birds singing in the garden", which we then pigeon-hole (*laughter*) and reject as boring, something already known. What if, instead of ignoring

it, you, again, break that conceptual shell and go deeply into the experience? What if you deconstruct it down into its parts, the aggregates? You start to see how all those parts relate to one another, how they echo and reflect one another. For instance, you see how a sound and the knowing of that sound are “echoes” of one another. They arise in dependence upon one another and immediately they pass away together.

There is this huge conceptual shell called the “objective world.” This is the assumption that it is “I” who perceives something which exists separate from “me” and is over “there”. This is what we mean by the dualistic world. The more you break that conceptual shell and look closely at what is actually happening, the more you realise this is not, fundamentally, the case. We find nothing but fragments and shards that are arising and reflecting and echoing and reverberating and creating this infinitely complex web. They are all fleeting aspects of the great unnamable mystery. Speaking loosely, we might say they are all parts of the same ocean of experience. The waves of the ocean are not different or separate from the ocean.

The whole dualistic construct is seen for what it is, illusory. There is no objective reality. It is merely con-

ceptual; a thought-out reality that everyone becomes fixated upon as being fundamentally real. The Real is not a duality. This is not a duality. I have slightly gone beyond the remit of the question! (*Laughter*).

**Student 1:** That is fantastic, that is really, really helpful. It is like a mental interface between thoughts and reality.

**Paul:** In order to live out the dualistic life, we utilise this solidifying of experience through creating these perceptual “shells.” That does not mean, however, that you cannot or should not see through them. The more you see through them, the more you realise that this whole apparent existence is actually being constructed in real time from all these fragments. These fragments are only here because of all these other fragments, which are only here because of all those other ones. There is, therefore, an endless echoing and reflection going on. And it is non-dual. There is no solid and separate “me” who is the observer of all this. “I am” is just another conceptual shell. Consciousness is one of those fragments, one of those ephemeral shards, an aggregate arising and passing away in this moment. ■



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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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