



AUKANA

*newsletter* 7/2025

HOUSE OF INNER  
TRANQUILLITY



*"Our natural state is hidden beneath layers and layers of ignorance and craving, and all the fury, fear and anxiety that lie on top of that. Dissolve the very roots of ignorance and craving through developing insight-wisdom and what you are left with is your natural state, which is sublimely happy and peaceful."*

PAUL HARRIS

## EDITORIAL

"Have you seen today's news? Given the terrible state the world is in, what exactly are you doing to help others? Or are you only concerned with helping yourselves?"

It would be a challenging question to handle at any time, but especially so when it comes from someone visiting the Centre during our biennial Open Day. The criticism lurking within the question is clear. How can we sit quietly with our eyes closed when the world around is in such apparent disarray? How can we be so concerned with our own suffering when there are others experiencing dire circumstances and who's need is far greater than our own? Aren't we just being selfish, ignoring the suffering around us? Shouldn't we be out there helping to fix all these problems?

These are perfectly valid questions to ask and deserve a fully nuanced

reply, not something that is always possible during an easy-going social event like the Open Day.

It is true that the world is suffering. At the time of writing, we are once again threatened by the ominous prospect of world war. Through the media, we are relentlessly bombarded with horrifying accounts of what people are living through; death, destruction, trauma and heartache, all caused by human greed, hatred and delusion. Who but the most callous, could fail to be appalled by the viciousness and apparent injustice of it all? Surely, the least we could do would be to voice our concerns on behalf of those who face such jeopardy? Beyond gathering together to protest on the street, however, what can we do? Such performative gestures may help to diffuse our anger and fear, but only temporarily, and they never

convince people intent on fighting to stop. Arguing about who is right and who is wrong, and taking sides only seems to add to the overall sense of anger, conflict and disharmony.

We would all very much like people to stop fighting one another. We would all much prefer people to be kind, honest, fair and respectful, it would make for a much happier and more peaceful world. Can we, however, coerce others into being peaceful? Can we force someone to stop acting out of greed and hatred? Can we compel them to be wise? Of course not. If we want to live in a peaceful world we can only work on ourselves. Who else can we work on?

The Buddha's teaching points to the interconnected nature of our world. We influence one another, both by the kinds of actions of body, speech and mind we perform and those we refrain from performing. Like the concentric ripples of water expanding outwards in a pond, our actions reach out to influence the world and, in time, return to us to experience as resultants. Through the development of mindfulness we observe how effortlessly the world mirrors our attitudes and behaviours back to us. Reflecting wisely on this, we recognise the value of choosing to live a life of ever greater harm-

lessness. This, it turns out, is the most effective way of helping others.

Gotama once asked his monks whether someone keeping the five Buddhist precepts would be censured by the wise or praised by them. The answer is obvious. Would the wise censure or praise someone for going out of their way to be of service to others? What about the regular practice of loving-kindness? Or, learning how to quieten the mind, and exploring the true nature of conscious experience in order to dissolve and eradicate all traces of greed, hatred and delusion? The answer is obvious, the wise will always praise such behaviour.

It seems strange that someone wishing that people should stop fighting would find fault with those that have already stopped fighting, but this is just the nature of our world. The Buddha's message is simple, if you want peace be peaceful. Eradicating the greed, hatred and delusion within our own nature is the greatest service we can offer the world. ■

## 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

**People:** It is possible for students to stay at the Centre for extended periods beyond the usual week-long residential courses. This kind of “mini recluse-ship” is beneficial for students as it provides plenty of opportunity to follow the Noble Eightfold Path and develop the three trainings in ethics, meditation and wisdom. In addition to regular seated meditation practice there are Dhamma talks with the full-time community, personal interviews with Paul and the chance to deepen friendships with other members of the Sangha. It is also an opportunity to serve the Sangha, engaging in very wholesome acts of body, speech and mind that will produce very beneficial results in the future, and encouraging the development of loving-attentiveness towards all aspects of life.

This spring saw several meditators make the most of the opportunity. **Ellen Foster** from Canada, who many will recognise from our regular fortnightly online meetings, was able to come and stay for two weeks. **Lin Quantick**’s regular three week stay this time coincided with **Marc Cooper** who was able to come in for four weeks. **Andrew Meere** was able to come in for the three weeks leading up to Open Day. Having come to know the place on previous retreats,



*Andrew Meere*

Andrew settled in right away. In addition to deepening his meditation practice, he benefited from getting to know fellow members of the Sangha. Andrew was very helpful around the houses and gardens, taking on all manner of projects in the busy time preparing for Open Day.

After many years of helpful service to the community and Facebook Group, **Glenda Brewer** has decided to step back from that position. We thank Glenda for her contribution and wish her well. **Paul Dear**, an enthusiastic online follower and a regular

attendee on the Zoom meetings, was invited to take on the role of the third member of the administration team for the Facebook Group. Paul accepted and has flung himself into the task, posting regularly and keeping an eye on things. We thank you, Paul, for your valued input.

**Maintenance:** Three of the retreat cells had new carpets fitted as the old ones were well worn and threadbare in places. Cell 4 had a pale grey carpet fitted and cells 5 and 6 had new pink carpets. These were in place before the last spring retreat and before the fitting of the new fire doors after the end of the season.

January was a busy time with fire alarms being fitted in all rooms and corridors, as well as emergency lighting being wired in around 9, 10 and 10a Masons Lane. A control box is situated at the roadside entrance to no.9 which has its own electricity supply in the event of a power outage. The fire alarms are mainly smoke detectors with the ones in kitchens responding to heat rather than smoke. There are also red Manual Fire Alarm Call Point boxes adjacent to exit doors which set off the alarms when actioned. All of this equipment is battery operated and each item communicates wirelessly with its neighbours. This ensures that anyone in any part

of the buildings is alerted in the event of a fire being detected. All the alarms are numbered and identifiable at the control panel enabling the source of the fire to be identified.

This sophisticated system was fitted by a local company who had just spent several weeks installing a similar system, albeit somewhat larger, at Longleat, the stately home and safari park in Wiltshire. The work here was completed in a few days. Initially, there were periodic warning bleeps at the control console, indicating that the most distant fixtures could not always be detected. This is quite usual, however, as the system takes a while to settle down as the 46 fire alarms and 12 call points learn to link with each other. The system is easy to monitor and the alarms are tested weekly by activating them at a call point.

The emergency lights are wired in to light fittings in some locations. They emit an eerie green light which is quite atmospheric at night. In areas where the electric wiring was inaccessible, torches with rechargeable batteries were fitted instead. These fit into normal electric wall sockets which are left turned on. The torches have light sensors so they glow dimly when it is dark. They come on fully in the event of a power outage enabling people to find their way to the exit doors.

Fire exit and directional signs have been reviewed and fire safety instructions have been updated following the changes.

The third and final essential item to bring us in line with the latest fire safety regulations has been installing the fire doors. We ordered these towards the end of January and it has taken some time to prepare them. Only five of the retreat room doors were a standard size and could be ordered ready varnished. The other six doors had to be precisely measured, with plans drawn up and agreed before they could be produced. The first shipment of fire doors arrived in mid-May and they were stored awaiting fitting. These were the six doors to the retreat rooms, the door from the annex into 10a stairwell and the door from the library to the annex kitchen.

**David Gilbert** undertook the task of varnishing the door to the stairwell and painting the door to the kitchen.

A further door arrived in the week following Open Day and Dave was able to get a couple of coats of paint on it. This was the back door to the annex kitchen, which is a custom sized half glazed unit. All of the doors were fitted between 30 June to 2 July by **Alex** and **Gavin** who are carpenters recommended by Dave. Further coats of paint are currently being applied and the door frames are being given

a few coats to brighten them up. The last two doors have finally arrived, having been shipped all the way from China. They are the last two glazed units that will be fitted at either end of the middle corridor.

We are experimenting with regulation methods of holding some fire doors open as they are fitted with overhead door closers to ensure they are kept shut. A battery operated unit has been attached to the wall to hold open the door between the cloakroom and 10a stairwell for when we exit the Shrine Room. It connects by a magnet that is screwed to the fire door and holds the door open until a button on the unit is pressed to release it. The unit is also designed to recognise the sound of the fire alarm going off, releasing the magnet if the door is open and, thereby, closing it in the event of fire being detected.

**Gardens: Brother Nigel** was in full swing preparing for Open Day. Work started early in the year with major pruning of overgrown shrubs and trees. The cuttings were quickly cleared with a couple of well controlled bonfires on the vegetable plot before planting took place. A longer cold period early in the year meant that some vegetable planting was delayed. Since then prolonged dry spells have led to scant germination

of some species and early ripening of others. The courgettes and melon plants, however, are producing well. There is a mystery plant growing in one of the large compost bins that is doing particularly well. It has not yet been identified but may be a squash of some sort. It is left to its own devices and, as squashes do when conditions are good, it is running amok. Let us hope it produces something edible.

**Open Day:** The week before our biennial Open Day saw several showers and periodic steady rain, greening up the lawns which had become parched in the preceding heat wave. During the week several extra helpers came in to do last minute lawn mowing, cutting back of plants encroaching on paths, sweeping outside, dusting and vacuuming throughout the properties, cleaning windows, arranging floral displays and setting up the shop, plant and tea stalls. Consequently, the garden and properties looked at their best. Meditators and their family members also volunteered to help out on the day at the various work stations. This included the stalls which did a brisk trade.

On Sunday 22 June the drive gate was opened at 2pm to welcome the first visitors. Just a little while before there had been a substantial down-pour for several minutes. It quickly

dried up, leaving a freshness to the garden and moderating the heat so that it was comfortable for visitors.

The tea stall was replete with cakes donated by meditators. The plant stall had an exceptional collection of specimens. Some had been prepared from division and cuttings from our own garden stock. Others had been donated by a nursery in Atworth that Brother Nigel has often visited. The owners were retiring and selling off their remaining stock. Brother Nigel mentioned our Open Day plant stall and the nursery owners donated a lot of their remaining stock to the Centre as a generous goodwill gesture.

Several people commented on how relaxed and calm the atmosphere was compared to previous Open Days, even though around 150 visitors came through the doors. For all that, it did not seem crowded as there is plenty of space, both inside and out, for people to wander round and explore. Please see the photo montage on pages 10 and 11 of preparations for the day and the event itself.

Thank you to all who contributed to the preparations for the day and who helped out on the day ensuring that it was such an enjoyable occasion. ■

# BRADFORD ON AVON

HOUSE OF INNER TRANQUILLITY

## RETREATS

### 6-Day Integrated Retreats

September 1-6  
October 20-25

### 6-Day Silent Retreats

August 18-23  
September 22-27  
October 6-11  
November 10-15  
November 24-29  
December 8-13

### Weekend Retreats

August 8-10  
September 12-14  
October 31-November 2

## OPEN MEDITATIONS

Saturday mornings 10.15-11.15. The door will be open from 10.05am, August 9 - December 13 inc.

## TAPE & LECTURE EVENINGS

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

August 6 **Dhamma Talk**  
August 13 Tape & library  
August 20 **Dhamma Talk**  
August 27 Tape & library  
September 3 **Dhamma Talk**  
September 10 Tape & library  
September 17 **Dhamma Talk**  
September 24 Tape & library  
October 1 **Dhamma Talk**  
October 8 Tape & library  
October 15 Tape & library  
October 22 **Dhamma Talk**  
October 29 Tape & library  
November 5 **Dhamma Talk**  
November 12 Tape & library  
November 19 **Dhamma Talk**  
November 26 Tape & library  
December 3 **Dhamma Talk**  
December 10 Tape & library  
December 17 **Dhamma Talk**

## MONDAY ONLINE MEETINGS

**Evening starts 7.30pm**

August 11, 25,  
September 8, 22,  
October 6, 27,  
November 10, 24,  
December 8

## SATELLITE GROUP

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## Open Day – Helpers, members and visitors





## Extract from a Dhamma Talk with full time students

### Question: How to increase interest in the observation of phenomena?

**Paul:** Excellent question. And what is the answer?

**Student 1:** Well, mindfulness, I guess.

**Paul:** It is the perfect answer. The answer to how to increase interest in the observation of phenomena is through the observation of phenomena. *(Laughter)*

All right, that is the short answer. There is, however, a slightly longer answer.

**Student 1:** Maybe the root of the question is that we are all different and we all have interests. My father likes finances and I like cooking, and he does not like cooking and I do not like finances. We come to this not particularly knowing observing sense-phenomena is a thing to be interested in, and we discover it is something that is super important, but I just do not seem to naturally get interested.

**Paul:** Why is it super important?

**Student 1:** The observation of phenomena is the path to understanding the nature of reality.

**Paul:** Here is the thing. If we say that the observation of phenomena is the path to understanding the nature of reality, we are, in effect, only interested in observing phenomena in so much as doing so gives us some reward, in this case, understanding. We are not interested in the phenomena themselves. If we consider the difference between intrinsic reward and extrinsic reward, perhaps the practice will no longer appear uninteresting to you.

I came across the story of an American man, a US Navy SEAL, I think he was. His life was not adding up, he was overweight and he was miserable. In order to gain some meaning in his life, he decided to join the Navy. This meant passing their infamously tough training regime, which he managed to do. During that time, he observed that when he trained with an idea of some extrinsic reward, it became a burden. It was painful because the release of the "reward" hormones and neu-

rotransmitters, such as endorphins, dopamine and serotonin, could only happen once he achieved his goal. If, therefore, you train with the expectation of a reward coming down the track sometime later, all those positive hormones are denied you. They just do not happen.

Whereas, when you run just for the sake of running itself, for the pure joy of running, you are not delaying the arising of that chemical release. The reward is the running itself, therefore, there is nothing to stop those pleasant feelings from arising. That was his great discovery. Now, he finds he can just keep on running. He is taking an intrinsic reward from the process of running itself, not what the running is going to give him. When we run with a view to getting a good-looking body, or to lose calories, we are delaying that reward.

It is exactly the same when it comes to the practice of mindful noting in meditation. If the mindful noting is being done with a view to what is going to come as a consequence, it very easily becomes a chore, something that needs to be done. We are missing the point. The point is that infinite mystery can be found in every single component part of experience. Its bril-

liance is blazing forth, expressing itself in every moment, telling us exactly what it is and we are just ignoring it. Instead, we are going through the motions, wondering when the bell is going to ring.

We are chasing an extrinsic reward such as, peacefulness, deep absorption or insights and are, as a consequence, denying the intrinsic reward that is always available to us. Essentially, we lack pleasurable interest, the mental sparkle and fascination in what we are doing.

The Buddha listed seven mental qualities that he called the factors of enlightenment. They are intrinsic to the development of insight-wisdom. These are mindfulness, investigation, balanced energy, pleasurable interest, tranquillity, concentration and equanimity.

It is a natural progression. Developing one factor leads to the arising of the next and you start with mindful noting. This is why your initial answer was, indeed, correct. Mindfulness is the choice-less awareness of whatever arises in your experience. Noting, naming what arises, is the second factor, investigation. Balanced energy is this attitude of resting, waiting and

allowing experience to unfold, rather than wilfully trying to manufacture results. You are within yourself, not “pushing the envelope” as it were. You are just here, now, alert but resting and waiting for the next thing to arise. You have no agenda, you are not trying to see transience. You are not looking for the mark of non-self. You are just waiting, meeting each new sound, feeling, thought, sensation with loving-attention and noting what is there.

When you get the balance right, the mind naturally starts to become fascinated with what is unfolding. The mind sparkles, it is zestful and interested naturally.

It is that lovely balanced state where you are not pushing. You are resting. You are receiving information through the six senses and content to note whatever is there. You are not trying to squeeze out insights, but just letting these finite displays of phenomena express themselves. And, every now and then, some previously unseen quality or characteristic of life is recognised. Or, rather, ceases to be ignored. And, it all just moves on from there. The practice becomes ever more absorbing and fascinating.

One of the many wonderful things Jacqui James said is that seeking for happiness brings unhappiness. If you are seeking for happiness, by definition, you must be in a state of non-happiness. In a similar vein, if you are seeking interest and fascination and pleasurable interest you must be in a state of mind that does not contain those qualities. So, do not look for them. Just faithfully carry out the instruction to, “Rest in the moment, content to note whatever arises and watch it pass away.”

Underlying the difficulty with finding mindful-noting interesting is often doubt. Doubt prevents the energy from being balanced. It takes different forms. For instance, if you are someone who likes to work hard, likes to get on with things and be on top of life, the right balance in meditation will feel like you are being asked to do nothing. And that can cause such a person massive doubts.

Another doubt is the notion that it cannot be this simple. It is something I have often heard when trying to help people with their understanding of what they are actually being asked to do. The way to realise enlightenment cannot possibly be this simple. But it is. It totally is. Yet, under the

spell of doubt, students will be forever complicating matters, like looking for signs of progress. They insist that they have to know where they are going before they get there, because that way they will be on top of things and can ensure it is all going to work. Alas, it simply does not work like that.

If you are holding on to the idea that, “If I do this, this is what I’ll get back,” then there is no space for the truth of what is unfolding to impinge upon you. You have to be in that place of uncertainty where you know nothing, assume nothing and are content to let the doubts show up without acting on them, without believing them or attaching to them. Only then are you allowing life to fully express itself without any bias.

When you finally surrender your spiritual ambitions and surrender to the uncertainty, and to the disquiet that such uncertainty manifests, and are willing to allow that unease to pass through, mindfully observing it, then the practice can really settle down. Tranquillity, concentration and equanimity now have the right conditions to arise and this zestful, peaceful contentment with mindful noting emerges. You are just content in the moment, resting, letting whatever

wants arise to arise, and that is when you start seeing life from new angles and in new ways. You start perceiving the world differently and your understanding of life starts changing.

This is why I say that the right mental attitude to bring to meditation is exploration, not ambition. Looking at, not looking for. Exploring “what is” rather than seeking some “otherness”, some other state of being. We have everything we need to look at what is happening right now. The aggregates, the three marks, condition-dependent origination, emptiness, these are not ideas coming out of thin air. They are all facts of existence embedded in what is happening right now. Understanding the Buddha’s higher teaching comes from taking a genuine interest in and mindfully noting phenomena. When anyone finally cottons on to where the balance is, and realises that it really is as simple as they have been told it is, their faith in themselves, the practice, the teaching and the teacher goes through the roof, “I can do this, this is so do-able, I’m just being asked to sit here and just note things, everything else will take care of itself. I can totally do this. And this, just this, is the way to realise *nibbana*, the discovery of the infinite mystery. Wow!” ■





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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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