



AUKANA

newsletter 1/2017

HOUSE OF INNER
TRANQUILLITY



“Surrender is sweet. Surrender is a beautiful thing. People are so terrified because they think it means becoming a doormat or something. It is, rather, a burden removed, the burden of constantly having to shore up one’s self-image as being sassy and in-the-know, and not being dependent on anyone for anything. That is such a hall of mirrors, such an illusion, and underneath it lies a terror of life. True surrender is to be free of all that. It is to finally acknowledge that you do not know, and to welcome some guidance, in whatever form it takes.”

PAUL HARRIS

EDITORIAL

At the end of every year the editors of the Oxford Dictionary choose a word or phrase that they believe captures the ethos, mood or preoccupation of the preceding twelve months. The word of the year for 2016 was the adjective “post-truth.”

What does “post-truth” mean? The Oxford Dictionary defines it as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” Last year we witnessed political campaigns based extensively on appeals to irrational fears and prejudices against certain groups of people, instead of a reasoned dissemination of the facts. The post-truth

phenomenon impacted greatly on social media too, where fake news was shared, sometimes millions of times, across newsfeeds. Another contributory factor has been the generation of computer algorithms on the internet that create content for us based on our past online behaviour. This process inadvertently creates a confirmation bias and a polarizing of views because it means that we tend to only receive the information that reinforces our chosen standpoint. Without being exposed to any other side of an argument, attitudes can and do become entrenched.

Is, however, the “post-truth era” anything new? Are we really to suppose that until very recently politicians

and the media have been exemplars of the upmost honesty and virtue? Is it only now that those seeking to influence the views of the masses feel at liberty to massage the facts in whatever way suits them? Or is it, actually, an age-old tactic for those who seek power to take advantage of people's fears and anxieties in such an uncertain world?

From a Buddhist perspective, the idea that we have entered a post-truth era is nonsense. Truth is timeless and is always immediately available to everyone. It does not come and go at all. It is just that most people insist on ignoring it. It is this willful blindness that is the breeding ground for the uncertainty, fear and anger that sends the world lurching from one crisis to the next. As a direct antidote to the suffering inherent in such ignorance the Buddha encouraged his students to live lives of tolerance, generosity and service. Further, he exhorted them to practise mindfulness diligently, to investigate and explore their conscious experience as it unfolds in order to gain direct insight into the true nature of existence.

In doing so we learn to stop ignoring reality and to acknowledge and restrain the urge to crave for it to be different. Through patient, steadfast

observation of the truth of transience, unsatisfactoriness and non-self, we discover that those very fears and anxieties, upon which the powerful prey, are receding from our mind-stream. As a consequence, we are able to let go of the views which we had previously depended on, because we see so clearly that such clinging was always the outcome of ignorance and fear. We find that we are able now to see life from many different points of view without ever particularly needing to subscribe to any one of them. We see clearly that, despite holding apparently polar-opposite views, the underlying problems of ignorance, fear and resistance are true for everyone.

Often, facing the truth can be painful at first. This is because it forces us to let go of illusions upon which we had developed an emotional dependency. If we are willing, however, to face reality and to learn from it, this leads us, ultimately, to a spontaneous and wholehearted surrender to the mysterious flow of life, allowing its hidden potentials to manifest and flourish. In doing so we find that the inherent uncertainty that had once been so feared is what actually makes living so vital, dynamic and fascinating. The truth, we discover, does indeed set us free. ■

NEWS

Promotion Committee: The Centre has thrived over many years without ever needing to promote itself extensively. We have ten published books and a website but very few other ways to let people know that we are here. Yet people do find us. The Saturday mindfulness workshops, for example, have only ever really been advertised on our website and most have been very well attended. The way people are accessing information is changing rapidly and there are so many more options available these days for those interested in meditation and truth-seeking. Finding new and interesting ways of catching people's attention is an important next step for the group.

To this end, Paul has asked **Anda Lutkevics** and **David Gilbert** to jointly run a lay committee tasked with creating and implementing a promotion campaign. The strategy will involve public speaking engagements for Paul, both online and in person, as well as utilising our YouTube channel, Facebook page, the new website and other social media. We are blessed with a great deal of readily available material such as audio, video and books that can be used in conjunction with our online presence to help create more exposure.

We would be very interested to

hear from anyone who has promotion or marketing experience and is willing to share their expertise with us. We would also like to hear from anyone who would like to be involved in the campaign, either as part of the organising team or simply to lend a hand when necessary. This is, of course, an ideal opportunity for meditators to develop selfless service as part of their training. The project will initially run for a year in order to see what kind of effect it has.

Website: The new website is finally up and running. In order to retain our search engine ranking it was essential to design a mobile-friendly site. This means that the content on the pages will change position and dimensions dependent on what type of screen it is viewed on. Hopefully, students will enjoy the aesthetics of the design, which incorporates quite a few different images from around the Centre. The design has retained the easy navigation and simplicity of its predecessor. Much of the information will remain the same as before, but the site will be more interactive, with clickable information boxes, videos and downloads. One area of improvement is the inclusion of a footer bar which has all the Centre's

contact details readily available on each page. As time goes on we hope to add more content including a brief history of our teaching lineage.

YouTube Channel: The Quiet Revolution continues! Although small by internet standards, our channel is doing very well, with the twenty-two videos posted having garnered five thousand views and over sixty subscribers. More important than the numbers, however, is that what people hear on these videos might be of benefit to them. They show the Centre and the teaching in a good light, help advertise Paul's book and, most importantly, are great fun to make without taking up too much time. Thank you to **Jason Rebello, Becky Fisher, Marcus Byrne, Kay Gilbert, and Kathleen Cowie** for being such good interviewers. We would very much like to do some more. If anyone would like to get involved with the production side, or feels comfortable talking to Paul whilst being recorded, please do get in touch.

Newsletter: Our twice-yearly newsletter will be featured prominently on the homepage of the new website and will be available for anyone to download in PDF format. We are very happy to continue to send physical

copies of the newsletter to whoever wants one, however, it would save time and money if people would like to download it instead. Please send us an email if you want to download the newsletter in future and we will take you off the snail-mail list.

Garden: This autumn was exceptional for the display of colour in the gardens. The various Japanese maples were gorgeously rich in colour, varying from subtle combinations of greens fading into reds through to fiery orange and crimson hues. The leaves stayed on the trees for a long time in the dry, still weather and were highlighted by glorious sunshine. The numerous tall delicate, fluffy fronds of the grasses in the border in front of the Shrine Room look awesome too, especially when they catch the low winter light. They seem to have been glowing in the sunshine for months.

One of the pink flowering Camellias at the top of No. 9 lawn has died. Despite being in completely the wrong type of soil they have, nonetheless, produced such wonderful displays over the years. **Brother Nigel** dug out the dead shrub and emptied the border ready for new planting. He attached some expanding trellis to a customised frame about a metre high. A passion flower that was struggling

in a shady spot has been relocated to this bed and will be trained over the trellis. It is more likely to thrive in the sunny, sheltered conditions here. The change will allow more light in to the building and onto the veranda where the magnificent large potted Agaves are overwintered.

David Gilbert, a regular day student, was given the task of rebuilding the pergola at the top of the stairs leading to the Japanese garden. The Weigelas that covered the structure were pruned back and the old pergola was removed. David created a Japanese look to the new pergolas by shaping sloping corners into the beams and rafters. Expanding trellis panels were added to each side of the pergola for a tidy finish.

As daylight faded in the late autumn afternoons, Brother Nigel took to clearing out the shed between the vegetable plot and gravel area. He burnt much of the scrap waste wood that was stored there and made several journeys to the recycling centre with other articles. A neighbour had kindly donated some wood which included several posts of solid, sturdy oak. These were perfect to replace some of the deteriorating upright posts holding up the shed roof and to add extra support where needed.

Maintenance: There were few maintenance projects in the autumn season. The main change was an adjustment to the light switches at both ends of the stairs to the nuns' quarters. For many years the stairs have been climbed in darkness in the late evening and early morning because, bizarrely, the top floor light could not be switched on from the bottom of the stairs. Thanks to modern technology, however, that situation has been resolved. The normal light switch upstairs was replaced with a receiver switch which controls the upstairs light as normal. A wireless transmitter switch was installed at the bottom of the stairs. Pressing the downstairs transmitter switch sends a signal to the receiver at the top of the stairs turning the light on or off. The new lighting arrangement improves safety, is more economical and has proved very helpful when cleaning the stairs during the morning work duty.

Brother Nigel repainted the radiators in the Shrine Room that were peeling and had become very untidy. This was just one of the many projects to be undertaken in the course of the next few months to ensure the Centre looks its best for the Open Day in June.

Another assignment planned for the early spring season is to replace the yellow carpet in the annex corridor

by the two washrooms and the retreat bedrooms. An assortment of swatches were obtained from our regular supplier. The selected colour will be a slightly more subdued shade, but we are sure it will still retain the warm, welcoming feel of its predecessor. Laying the carpet is initially scheduled for the first week in February.

Open Day: This year on Sunday, 18 June the Centre will be holding its biennial Open Day. This is a wonderful opportunity for meditators to invite family and friends to visit the Centre and have a look around the houses and gardens. They can also meet Paul and the full time community as well as fellow meditators and supporters. It is always a happy and friendly occasion and visitors never fail to be impressed with the Centre.

Traditionally there is a tea stall selling drinks and cakes donated by meditators. A shop is set up in the Ruby room selling books, Buddha figures and incense. Brother Nigel also organises a stall with plants propagated from the Centre's house and garden, as well as plants donated by meditators.

It takes a great deal of work to prepare for the day, particularly in the week or two just prior. It is, therefore, another opportunity for meditators to

offer their services to the Centre. We will be asking for volunteers nearer the time. Please let us know if you can come in to help of an afternoon.

Satellite groups: **Jim Vuylsteke** who runs the group in Toronto, Canada says that they met regularly in the autumn at the home of one of the group. She has recently moved outside the city so Jim is currently looking at an alternative venue to hold meetings more centrally. The website that Jim has prepared for the group will go live when a venue has been confirmed.

Dan Curtis who runs the group in Victoria, Canada reports, "Our dedicated group continues to meet every Wednesday from 7pm to 9pm. We completed our annual winter residential weekend silent retreat in November. We also concluded our year-long study and practice of the ten *paramis*. We have started the new year with an in depth study of suttas 18 and 19 from the Middle Length Discourses." ■

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.

BRADFORD ON AVON

HOUSE OF INNER TRANQUILLITY

RETREATS

6-Day Integrated Retreats

February 6-11

March 27-April 1

May 22-27

6-Day Silent Retreats

February 13-18

March 6-11

April 3-8

April 24-29

May 29-June 3

Weekend Retreats

February 24-26

April 14-16

May 5-7

TAPE & LECTURE EVENINGS

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

February 1	Lecture
February 8	Tape
February 15	Q&A
February 22	Tape
March 1	Lecture
March 8	Tape
March 15	Q&A
March 22	Tape
March 29	Lecture
April 5	Tape
April 12	Q&A
April 19	Tape
April 26	Lecture
May 3	Tape
May 10	Wesak
May 17	Tape
May 24	Q&A
May 31	Tape
June 7	Lecture

OPEN MEDITATIONS

Saturday mornings 10.15-11.15. The door will be open from 10.05am, February 4 - June 3 inc.

SATURDAY WORKSHOPS

10am to 3pm

March 25

April 22

May 20

WESAK

Wednesday May 10

Evening starts 7.30pm

Doors open from 7.15pm

OPEN DAY

On Sunday 18 June, the Centre, Monasteries and gardens will be open between 2 and 6pm. All readers of this newsletter, their families and friends are welcome to attend.

SATELLITE GROUPS

Activities: Please contact

Toronto Canada: Jim Vuylsteke

Tel: +1-416-536-5698

AukanaToronto@sunyata.ca

Victoria Canada: Dan Curtis

Tel: +1-250-598-5887

dancurtis@shaw.ca

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Other Voices: Alison Muir and Dennis Brewer



Dennis Brewer and Alison Muir began attending the Centre in 2016 after attending a mindfulness workshop. This interview was conducted at the end of their first six-day residential course.

Questioner: How have you enjoyed your first integrated retreat?

Alison: I have enjoyed pretty much all of it. The challenging thing was the actual work. (*laughter*) The food was wonderful, the company and the gardens especially so.

Dennis: It's a beautiful garden. I've enjoyed working on the other side, down next to the greenhouse. It was nice being out there raking leaves. When I first got here, I didn't want people judging my work. Then I realised about day three that it wasn't about how much work I got done or even the quality of it. It was the fact that I was being mindful of what I was doing. Although I did try to do the best

job I could do, I didn't let it bother me so much after that.

Alison: I found that after spending the morning working on my mind, it was nice to go out into the garden in the afternoon and be mindful doing a job. I think to do a bit of both balanced it up.

Dennis: Doing five complete hours of meditation a day can feel fairly draconian for someone who has never done anything close to that. But when the opportunity came up I thought, well, why not? If I'm going to walk down this path I need to know what it's about.

Alison: I have never had a timetable since I was fifteen, so I actually think it has been good for me to have a structure. I'm going to take some of this home with me. Three meals a day with no snacking in between is a good one. You have breakfast and

then do a little job at eight o'clock followed by meditation. I like the way it's set up. If it had been a free-for-all it wouldn't have had the right effect for me. Brother Nigel, Sister Sara and Anda keep the house running ever so smoothly. They are great, all three of them.

Dennis: I love the fact that we are able to have dinner with them each night. Just a chance to get to know them and to hear their stories about walking the path. That was always part of the conversations which I thought was really good. All this *dhamma* is great, but you have to go back out into the work-a-day world and carry it all with you somehow, and that's very difficult. Although the retreat is a contained environment, to break silence at 2pm, to be able to go around the place, help out, do things and talk to people is really good because it mirrors life outside to some degree.

Alison: It was nice to come on a retreat with my partner. We have the same interest in Buddhism. We came on the retreat together, but separate, because it's silent in the mornings and evenings after supper. It actually worked out better than I thought it would. I was just able to let Dennis be Dennis and do my own thing.

Q: Would you recommend integrated retreats to other people?

Dennis: I really would. The thought

of a six-day silent retreat was daunting. I think the integrated retreat is a good stepping stone for us. We did the weekend retreat to see what it was like. Do we even want to come back? Is the community good for us? And are we good for the community? Alison suggested we do the integrated retreat and I think that was the better option than diving straight into the deep end of the pool, if you will.

Alison: I think for me, because I suffer a bit of social phobia, a silent retreat would probably have been easier. Sitting together for dinner in the evenings was quite challenging for me but it did me good. After my silent weekend retreat, my first retreat ever, I did go home and I was much more mindful. In my garden especially, being right here, now, there was more awareness of nature. It was beautiful. For a time afterwards it was like a brand new world.

And this retreat, it has been great working outside and mixing with other people. It's actually done me good. I would recommend the integrated retreats. I have learnt so much more than I ever would have at home in the same amount of time. As a last thought, Dennis offered me a week's holiday, anywhere I liked. I said I wanted to go to the House of Inner Tranquillity because I know it's good for me. ■

Extract from a Dhamma Talk with full time students

Question: If meditators experience negative things such as theft or cruelty, how can they come to see that these may be due to past actions or to their attitude to life now?

Student 1: When I was looking at this question again it came to me in a different way, which is about how people attract positive and negative experiences to themselves. For instance, one person is attracting a swarm of wasps but does not make the connection between that and how much hatred she has in her mind at that time. Another person, say, worries about getting ill on holiday and he goes on holiday and gets ill.

Paul: That was undoubtedly the case when I was in India. I am not saying that I never got ill, but I never experienced a serious gastric complaint like other people did. Travellers were often worrying excessively about what they were eating.

Student 1: Another example is worrying about the youths in your neighbourhood, then one day you find that your car has been scratched. It is not realising that this might have been an outcome of the way you think about

the world around you.

Paul: The Buddha maintained that the mind is the forerunner of all things and that it is the mental quality of craving that is the cause of suffering and not the external events themselves. I remember when I was a monk passing some lads on the street and being insulted by them. At the time it upset me a little bit. When I next saw Alan I reported this incident and he asked "What were you thinking?" I looked back at my experience, and guess what I was thinking? "Oh, these lads are going to be trouble." It became a self-fulfilling prophesy. Seeing that what you do internally can be reflected externally in that way was a paradigm shift in understanding for me.

We talk about the benefits of practising loving-kindness on a daily basis as part of your daily routine. What are some of those benefits? Other beings see you as lovable and you are less likely to come up against fire, weapons, poisons, and so-forth. What is that saying? It is saying that the way you act mentally determines the type and quality of experience you go through. One of the hallmarks of a student who is meditating

correctly is that they come across so much apparent serendipity and good fortune. They cannot believe their luck. Is it luck, though, or does their general outlook and how they choose to behave mentally attract certain outcomes towards them?

How does somebody come to see that positive or negative experiences are an outcome of either their attitude to life now, or actions performed in the past? If someone is treating us badly, verbally abusing us, say, what would be the negative response?

Student 2: Fight back and not accept the situation, respond in an inefficient way.

Paul: "It's unfair." "I don't deserve this." "This is being done for no reason." There is a total rejection of the experience that, in turn, leads to self-defence. All of which has further negative consequences. That fighting back might not be verbal or physical necessarily, it might just be happening on the mental level, but that will still have an effect. It is still volitional action, it is something that you are doing. What might be a wiser way of responding to that situation?

Student 1: To question whether there is anything that you have actually

been doing yourself that could have brought it about. Then reflecting on why the Buddha recommended the practice of loving-kindness.

Paul: Exactly. "What mental states am I running?" That is the first and most important reflection. "What am I doing now?" or "What mind-states have I been doing?" If it is the case that you cannot detect anything specifically, then, perhaps, this may very well be the result of some past action. We all have the hidden potential for the results of our past actions to arise. It only requires suitable supporting conditions to come together now, and a resultant is going to manifest whether we like it or not. If it is the resultant of some past unwholesome kamma, then be glad that it is happening now with these conditions, because the conditions could have been much worse and the experience even more painful.

In all cases, it does all boil down to accepting that mental actions have results. You have to accept the reality of what happened. You have no control over that at all. Now, by accepting it for what it is, there is the possibility to develop the culture of the mind in a positive direction. If we are trying to change things because we believe that it should not have happened,

then that is just more negative *kamma* being created. If, however, it is coming from a position of acceptance, then we can change the future for the better by making a better choice now.

Student 3: Something negative happened to me recently and prompted negative thoughts like, “Why is this person acting like this to me? It seems so unfair.” You asked me whether I had ever done anything similar in the past and I was able to see that it is just a process. It was simply time for me to feel it coming back my way again.

Paul: It is just like throwing a stone in the pond, the waves go out and the waves come back again. If you refrain from acting further, eventually all the energy is naturally dissipated and the waves disappear.

Question: Please may we look at the various forms of restraint and how they benefit the practice?

Paul: What different forms can restraint take?

Student 2: I was thinking in terms of physical, verbal and mental. *Sila* is more physical-orientated. The precepts set the framework and are the foundation for the practice but it

seems that mental restraint is crucial because everything comes from the mind anyway. I just wanted to explore that aspect.

Paul: Yes, mind is the forerunner of all things. The most direct method of learning the value of restraint is to start practising on the physical level, hence why we keep the five precepts. We can never divide mind and body. Physical actions always begin life as ideas in the mind. What is it that keeping the precepts shows us?

Student 2: It highlights craving and hatred.

Paul: Which are mental qualities. What else does it develop, if someone is practising rightly? What is needed in order to restrain that craving and hatred?

Student 2: You need mindfulness to know what is going on, and, later, to be able to reflect on the results of your actions.

Paul: Yes, you need mindfulness and clear comprehension of what is actually taking place in your experience, both on the physical and mental levels. Through restraining the physical you are actually acting mentally too.

For instance, somebody might be really angry with someone else but choose not to say or do anything. That choice is then followed by the karmically active component of volition, in this case refraining from acting on the inefficient impulse.

Can you see, however, that in order to keep the precepts there must be a certain amount of wisdom and a certain amount of mental development already established? You cannot live ethically without any mindfulness or wise reflection. They are intimately intertwined. For instance, one of the results of keeping the precepts is having a quieter mind, one is less obsessed with guilty dread and remorse. This, in turn, helps with our capacity for mindfulness as we enjoy a more spacious mindset. We, therefore, create a virtuous circle. As the mindfulness develops further it even becomes possible to see the mere potential for inefficient responses emerging. Then it is not a matter of having to restrain the urge to say or do anything externally. This means, therefore, being able to restrain purely on the mental level. Not with clenched fists or tightened jaw, baring one's teeth, trying desperately to keep the anger in. It is, rather, having the necessary wisdom and mindfulness to recognise and acknowledge that inefficiency

and just watch the painfulness of it pass away.

It all rests on an inner commitment. It is genuine honesty that is the gateway to understanding true restraint. We all make mistakes. On the verbal level we say things then afterwards experience the resultant painful feeling and a sense of remorse. With experience you can just recognise it and accept it. You do not need to identify with it being 'me', and 'me', therefore, being a 'bad person'. Why let it define you? You can just say, "Alright, that action brought this result. In hindsight, doing my very best to refrain from acting in that way seems like a better idea." You can now let yourself off this self-created hook. You are finally allowed to make some mistakes. You made a mistake and "Ow!" this is the result. It is not 'me', it is not 'mine', it is not 'myself'. A few days later, perhaps, you remember engaging in the wrong speech and you feel awkward and, again, wish that you hadn't done that. Well, that is just the reverberation of the waves in the pond because of that brick you threw in there. Just accept it and move on. It is transient, after all. It just requires the same mindfulness and clear comprehension to be applied. This is how wisdom is developed. ■



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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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